

Beyond Melancholia: Algeria and its Spectres

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ABSTRACT

This thesis problematizes the recent transdisciplinary turn to melancholia by grounding the concept within the literature of three contemporary Algerian authors: Assia Djebar, Yasmina Khadra, and Boualem Sansal. If Freud figured melancholia as a pathological response to loss, much recent scholarship has reconceptualized it as an ethico-political model of remembrance that safeguards the memory of the lost or marginalized other. Yet the recent and ubiquitous depathologization of melancholia is only possible insofar as theorists overlook its more insidious elements. By analyzing how melancholia emerges within the postcolonial novels of Djebar, Khadra, and Sansal, this thesis reveals how melancholia in fact undermines an ethico-politics of remembrance, further displacing those lost others that theorists of melancholia would recuperate. Divided into two sections, the first part of the thesis thus challenges the ethico-political viability of melancholia as a mnemonic model. Through close readings of the texts, the first four chapters reveal postcolonial melancholia in Algeria to be imbricated in amnesia, immobility, repetition, victimhood, apolitical retrospection, and the unethical appropriation of the lost object. Part II investigates how the authors imagine different models of remembrance that move beyond the limits of the mourning and melancholia dyad. If melancholia has been depathologized, it nonetheless remains ensnared within a binary system in which the subject either forgets (mourns) or engages in a putative act of hyper-remembrance (melancholia). Building upon the recent theory of Dominick LaCapra, Mireille Rosello, and Judith Butler, the final two chapters explore the critical potential of 'working upon' the past. As an on-going and conscious model of remembrance, 'working upon' actively resists the closure inherent to mourning but it also circumvents the melancholic (re)appropriation of the past and its lost others. Ultimately, then, this thesis signals the need for emergent models of memorialization that move beyond the restrictions of the Freudian binary of mourning and melancholia.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Beyond Melancholia: Algeria and its Spectres sought to problematize the overuse of melancholia in recent theory by analysing the concept within the literature of three postcolonial Algerian authors who write in French: Assia Djébar, Yasmina Khadra, and Boualem Sansal. The idea for the thesis originally emerged out of a Master's dissertation on haunting memories of Algeria's colonial past in three novels by Tahar Djaout, Assia Djébar, and Boualem Sansal. It was during this period that I began to question what seemed to be an overabundance of tropes of haunting and spectrality across the disciplines. 'Postcolonial haunting' in particular appeared as a solution of sorts to a series of difficulties concerning the remembrance of the past. The ghostly subaltern figure could return to the present to articulate his or her history, thus ostensibly circumventing the ethical issues of representation outlined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. Especially where minority groups and individuals were concerned, the ghost's haunting, repetitive return was seen to foreclose the forgetting or erasure of the past, proffer a challenge to dominant historical narratives, and give a voice to the other of History. Inspired in large part by Jacques Derrida's seminal text *Spectres de Marx* (1993), haunting was not only conceived as an ethical way of relating to elided others, then, but it was (and remains) a powerful and affective tool in literature and theory alike.

Preliminary research into modes of memorialization—particularly in the field of postcolonialism but also in relation to queer theory, slavery, and the Holocaust, to name but a few—revealed a parallel between the emergence of haunting from the 1990s onwards and the concurrent interdisciplinary depathologization of melancholia. Indeed, like haunting, melancholia had emerged as a putatively ethical mnemonic framework for remembering

marginalized identities past and present, including the colonized other and victims of slavery, homophobia, and racism. If haunting had been recuperated as a means of keeping alive the (forgotten) past, then melancholia was similarly deployed to thwart the processes of forgetting typically associated with the work of mourning. In his infamous essay ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917), Sigmund Freud figures mourning as a healthy form of grief that enables the subject to ‘move on’ and reinvest his libidinal ties in a new love object; conversely, melancholia appears as a pathological model of grief in which the subject is unable to relinquish the loss. The melancholic thus sustains his attachment to the lost object (in Freud’s essay the subject is indeed masculine)—which could be any number of things, including an individual, a place, or an ideal—by incorporating that object within his psychic topography. While this melancholic attachment is imagined as a narcissistic model in which the subject identifies as the object, post-Freudian theorists have re-imagined it as an ethical form of remembrance. Melancholia has thus been redeployed as the mnemonic model par excellence because its preservation of the lost object is read as the ethical preservation of the other. If mourning can be equated with exorcism, melancholia and haunting have emerged as frameworks that promote the remembrance and preservation of minorities and their effaced histories: in both, the ghostly lost object is valorized and preserved at all costs.

The relative ‘success’ of melancholia and haunting across the disciplines can be linked to their affective dimensions as well as to the rationale behind them: it is difficult to argue with the ethical message that minority histories should be remembered. Nonetheless, I had several misgivings about the appropriateness of melancholia and haunting for this purpose as well as concerns over their widespread application. If the turn to an ethics of melancholia and haunting was inspired by poststructuralism and its attentiveness to the singularity of the other,

the ever-growing body of theory relating to tropes of loss, haunting, spectrality, *hantologie*, and so forth risked undermining their usefulness. At times, they risked being deployed as meta-narratives that did anything but attend to the local and the particular. What is more, although theorists insisted upon referencing Freud's original binary of mourning and melancholia to advance their arguments, their model of melancholia was so far removed from the Freudian one that it was difficult to reconcile the two; in other words, 'Mourning and Melancholia' was being cited in an extremely partial manner, since many of the hypotheses in Freud's essay would have posed a challenge to the new depathologized version of melancholia. In addition, the much celebrated melancholic preservation of the other is troubled by Freud's claim that, in preserving the object, the subject proceeds to identify as the object, ultimately blurring the boundary between self and other. These concerns, together with melancholia's relationship to the unconscious and to issues of victimhood, sterile repetition, and 'unspeakability' make it a less than likely candidate for an ethics of memory.

The Introduction thus provides a survey of melancholia as it emerges in recent theory. It begins by contextualizing melancholia within the 'memory boom' of the twentieth century. The development of trauma theory—and hence an appreciation of the belatedness of traumatic 'memory'—as well as the concomitant emergence of Holocaust testimonials and the advent of paradigms such as poststructuralism and postcolonialism encouraged a vested interest in memory. Questions of who we should remember arose in conjunction with how we should remember, thus giving rise to a body of theory that proffered melancholia and haunting as the most ethical response to loss. In the Introduction I give an overview of why mourning has been rejected as a mode of forgetting before summarizing the claims of theorists in favour of an ethico-politics of melancholia (cf. Jacques Derrida; David L. Eng and David Kazanjian;

Ranjana Khanna; R. Clifton Spargo; Sarah Brophy; Geoffrey Bennington; Giorgio Agamben etc.). I also provide a synopsis of recent theories of haunting and give examples of overlaps between theories of melancholia and haunting while also pointing to their differences. The Introduction then proceeds to problematize theories of haunting by analysing in depth the issues listed above and by focusing on their relationship to utopia and modes of forgetting.

If many theorists continue to deploy mourning and melancholia as models for attending to loss and trauma, this thesis ultimately calls for new modes of memorialization that move beyond the Freudian binarism. In particular it signals to the work of Dominick LaCapra and Mireille Rosello, who have both sought to imagine models of memory that move beyond repetition (haunting or melancholia) and forgetting (exorcism or mourning). While LaCapra's scholarship relates to the Holocaust and trauma theory, Rosello is concerned with the ethics of remembering the colonial past, with a particular focus on France and the Maghreb. Both theorists have underscored the importance of returning to the Freudian concept of 'working through', arguing that, in addition to the fact that it was little developed by Freud, it remains an ambiguous concept today. Rather than viewing 'working through' in opposition to 'acting out', as Freud did, LaCapra and Rosello conceive it as a model that might enable us to move beyond the dualistic thinking that dominates memory studies. Working through, in this sense, is not to be confused with mourning, in which there is an end goal in sight; instead it is an interminable and conscious process of 'working upon' the past that seeks to open up new connections between historical events and unearth previously hidden or obscured elements of history. If melancholic repetition gives rise to isolating victimhood, then working through is imagined as a process that foregrounds overlaps and interconnections between histories and communities, thus encouraging dialogue and

comparativist approaches. Building upon Theodor Adorno's historical and psychological conceptualization of 'working upon', LaCapra and Rosello conceive working through as a conscious mode of remembrance. Rather than celebrate the *unheimlich* and its attendant ghosts, they favour a model that might limit the repetitive return of the repressed. Having critiqued current theorizations of melancholia, then, the Introduction provides an overview of contemporary theories of 'working through' the past. Finally, it points to the recent work of Judith Butler, whose theorization of loss, grief, and mourning proffers a substantial challenge to Freud's melancholic model, further nuancing Rosello's and LaCapra's arguments.

The thesis is structured according to two parts and follows the logic of the Introduction: Chapters One through Four analyse melancholia as it emerges in the narratives of Djébar, Khadra, and Sansal, while Chapters Five and Six investigate how the authors' narratives enact modes of working upon the past. I ultimately settled on the term 'working upon', which is more suitable than 'working through' because it emphasises the on-going nature of the process and circumvents, to some extent at least, the easy correlation between working through and mourning. The chapters move the thesis away from more theoretical discussions of loss and mourning by focusing on contemporary novels (published from 1995 onwards) that treat the Algerian War of 1954-62—a conflict which led to Algerian independence—and the more recent civil war of the 1990s. More abstract conceptualizations of loss thus give way to specific socio-historical case studies. In contrast to scholarship that has figured melancholia as the most appropriate response to a whole series of different losses, then, in this thesis I sought to contextualize the theory in order to question the validity of a 'one-size-fits-all' model of grief.

In Chapter One, ‘Appropriating the Other: On the Ethics of Melancholia in Assia Djébar’s *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* (1995) and *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002)’, I put forth the premise that Djébar’s novels both engage with and problematize tropes of melancholia, haunting, spectrality and so on. If *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* figures the spectral return of Djébar’s late friends as a constructive albeit at times troubling phenomenon, by the time *La Femme sans sépulture* is published the phantasmal return of the protagonist Zoulikha Oudai is riddled with anxiety. The chapter proffers a challenge to recent theories that herald melancholia as an ethical mode of grief by revealing how Djébar’s narratives probe the ethics of haunting. Building on the work of Hungarian-born psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok—particularly their theory of the transgenerational phantom and their analysis of incorporation (melancholia) and introjection (mourning)—the chapter underscores the limits of melancholia. It reveals the debilitating effects of melancholic incorporation on both the ghost and those it haunts, in this case Zoulikha’s adult daughters. Haunting and melancholia are shown to be static models of ‘remembrance’ that compel the subject to relive the moment of trauma *ad infinitum*.

Chapter Two, ‘Melancholic Victimhood in Boualem Sansal’s *Le Village de l’Allemand: ou Le Journal des frères Schiller* (2008)’ builds on the first chapter to reveal how melancholia’s repetitive structure encourages victimhood. Sansal’s novel is set in the 1990s and moves across borders to deal with Algeria, France, Germany, Poland, and Egypt. Based on historical fact, it reveals the reactions of two Algerian brothers following their discovery that their late father was a Nazi during World War II. In particular, the chapter focuses on how Rachel’s melancholic response to this news leads him to figure himself as a victim. Not only does he regard himself as the victim *par excellence*, but he also usurps the subject

position of the Holocaust victim, in a move identified by LaCapra as vicarious victimhood. Just as the Freudian melancholic cannot ascertain precisely what or who has been lost, Rachel conflates lost objects and subjects (himself, his father, and the victims of the Holocaust) to the extent that he ultimately becomes interchangeable with the millions who died in the Nazi death camps. In many ways, then, Sansal's novel offers a much more damning indictment of melancholia than Djébar's narratives.

In Chapters Three and Four—'Nostalgic Returns in Assia Djébar's *La Disparition de la langue française* (2003)' and 'Melancholic Violence and the Spectre of Failed Ideals in Gillo Pontecorvo's *La Bataille d'Alger* (1966) and Yasmina Khadra's *À quoi rêvent les loups* (1999)'—I analyse the relationship between nostalgia and melancholia. Building upon Svetlana Boym's distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia, in which the former is a more spectral variety and the latter is linked to fundamentalist movements and the desire to establish a putatively lost whole, the chapters show how melancholia is linked to retrospection and stasis. Rather than figuring as a politically useful or radically transformational model, then, melancholia gives rise to sterile repetition. Chapter Three reveals how Berkane, the protagonist of Djébar's text, is consumed with a desire to recuperate his lost Algerian childhood. As his obsession with the past increases, so does his neglect of the political tensions that, at the beginning of the 1990s, were leading to widespread violence. Djébar's narrative is critical of a particular kind of retrospective gaze that elides connections between past and present. Indeed, in many ways Berkane's reflective nostalgia blinds him to the restorative nostalgia that was informing the fundamentalist movement of the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) and which forms the basis of Khadra's novel *À quoi rêvent les loups*. In Chapter Four, the final section of Part I, I examine the melancholic relationship between

the Algerian War and the civil war of the 1990s. In particular, by juxtaposing Khadra's text with Gillo Pontecorvo's celebrated film *La Bataille d'Alger*, I probe the manner in which memories and elements of the so-called 'first' Algerian War appear hauntingly in the 1990s. Melancholia is associated with extremist religious and political factions and operates as a conservative mechanism rather than a model for socio-political and ethical change.

Having analysed how melancholia emerges as a debilitating concept in the novels of Djébar, Khadra, and Sansal, in Part II I examine how these authors conceptualize 'working upon' the past and its losses. Chapter Five, 'Detective Fiction and 'Working Upon': Investigating the (Post) Colonial Past in Boualem Sansal's *Le Serment des barbares* (1999) and Yasmina Khadra's *La Part du mort* (2004)', examines how the genre of detective fiction can operate as a historicizing model for working upon the past. In contrast to Berkane in *La Disparition de la langue française*, Khadra's and Sansal's protagonists seek interconnections between the past and present that point to a form of memorialization beyond melancholia and retrospection. Their detectives seek links between the Algerian War and the civil war of the 1990s, but they do not establish any definitive solution to the crimes they investigate; in other words, they do not close their case and 'move on'. Rather, in line with Rosello's and LaCapra's notion of 'working through', their investigations are hybrid and self-questioning, refuting both the finitude of mourning and the repetition inherent to melancholia. If Chapter Five focuses on historical modes of 'working upon', Chapter Six—'Auto-analyse and Autofiction: Reworking the Self-Other Dyad in Assia Djébar's *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (2007)'—explores Djébar's latest autofictional narrative with reference to the work of Judith Butler. Building on Butler's theorization of an ethics of grief based on dispossession and undoing rather than on the mastery of melancholic subject-object relations, I reveal how

Djebar proposes an ethics of loss that begins with a return to the self. The subject is rendered vulnerable in ways that are unimaginable in a melancholic model that foregrounds the self-serving appropriation of the object, instead enabling a reconnection with the fragility of the other. The recognition of the other's vulnerability operates as a point of departure for an ethics of memory that is inherently self-questioning and open to change. Part II of the thesis thus seeks to move beyond the binary of mourning and melancholia to analyse alternative models of remembrance that might nuance the burgeoning field of memory studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Tropes of Absence, Tropes of Loss: Towards a Critique of Contemporary Mourning Theory

[M]elancholy—yes, melancholy—, has been reclaimed by deconstruction, holocaust studies, feminism, and gay studies, among others. Indeed, the current return of melancholy exceeds any particular approach and or single period; I would speak rather of the melancholy of the disciplines.

*Naomi Schor*¹

The Millennial Memory Boom

In spite of its technological and medical advances, or indeed perhaps because of them, the twentieth century ranked as the most murderous era in recorded history.² In this ‘age of extremes’ an estimated 187 million people perished in wars waged in the name of empires, nation-states, political regimes, and minority groups.³ This is a staggering figure, not least because the majority of those wartime victims were civilians with no connection to militaristic operations.⁴ This unprecedented shift from a clearly demarcated mode of warfare, in which soldiers entered into battle with fellow soldiers, to one in which civilians have come to represent the main casualties of war, is by no means inadvertent. Indeed, ‘war has come increasingly to target civilian populations’, to the extent that they ‘now comprise by far the majority of those killed, mutilated, raped, and uprooted even when they present no conceivable threat to the military adversaries’.⁵ The horror of events including Hiroshima, colonialism and its aftermath, and the Holocaust—with the Final Solution representing the

¹ Naomi Schor, *One Hundred Years of Melancholy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 1.

² Eric Hobsbawm, *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism* (London: Little Brown, 2007), p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵ Omer Bartov, Atina Grossman and Mary Nolan, ‘Introduction’, in *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Omer Bartov, Atina Grossman and Mary Nolan (New York: The New Press, 2002), pp. vii-xxxiv (p. xv).

most extreme example of how warfare targets civilians—has resulted in our very own millennial ‘memory crisis’, as theorists grapple with how best to remember and honour the victims of these tragedies.⁶ What has ensued is a palpable turn away from seemingly objective historical discourse towards a mnemonic mode of remembering the past that valorizes personal testimony and subjective experience. This sentient ‘culture of memorialization’,⁷ discernible in both popular culture and theoretical discourse, is so prevalent that Henry Rousso even goes so far as to suggest that we are ‘now living in an “age of memory”, that is, in a sensitive, affective, even painful relationship with the past’.⁸ Elsewhere Victoria Best and Kathryn Robson have remarked that, in France, ‘memory has become an increasingly dominant obsession’, an observation that proves germane to a variety of socio-political and national contexts.⁹

One reason for this explosive ‘millennial memorialization boom’¹⁰ is undoubtedly the belated character of trauma and the way in which it is experienced too soon to be fully comprehended.¹¹ To be sure, latent memories of traumatic events do return, but only partially as involuntary, unassimilated fragments, replete with all the horror of the original experience.

⁶ Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 3.

⁷ Mireille Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives: Works of Mourning in Progress* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 4.

⁸ Henry Rousso, *The Haunting Past: History, Memory, and Justice in Contemporary France*, trans. by Ralph Schoolcraft (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 1.

⁹ Victoria Best and Kathryn Robson, ‘Memory and Innovation in Post-Holocaust France’, *French Studies*, 59.1 (2005), 1-8 (p. 1).

¹⁰ William Watkin, *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 14. For further references to the memory boom of recent years see also, Bartov, Grossman, and Nolan, p. xviii; Wojciech H. Kalaga and Tadeusz Rachwal, ‘Introduction’, in *Memory, Remembering, Forgetting*, ed. by Wojciech H. Kalaga and Tadeusz Rachwal (Frankfurt; New York: Peter Lang, 1999), pp. 7-8; Sarah Henstra, *The Counter-Memorial Impulse in Twentieth-Century English Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 1; Marty Roth, *The Cultures of Memory: Memory Cultures, Memory Crisis and the Age of Amnesia* (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2011), p. xiv; Debra Kelly, ‘Crises of Memory: Victimization and Forgiveness’, *Journal of Romance Studies*, 8.1 (2008), 107-15 (p. 112); Ronit Lentin, *Co-Memory and Melancholia: Israelis Mourning the Palestinian Nakba* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 21.

¹¹ See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 4.

The belated nature of many survivors' memories of the Holocaust is thus one reason for the surge of interest in witness testimonies from the 1970s onwards, in which the Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University played a key role. Of course, this interest in memory stemmed from a general ethical awakening in public consciousness and a desire to face up to the horrors of the twentieth century, as well as the very real concern that the generation that had experienced these events would soon be gone. This resulted in what has been described as 'a memory panic',¹² a phenomenon which has led Dominick LaCapra to contend that 'the problem of memory has become so widespread and intense that one is tempted to take a suspicious view and refer to fixation'.¹³

LaCapra's critique points to the way in which much recent theoretical debate is often more concerned with establishing critical modes of remembering than it is with remembering per se; who we should remember and how incites fierce academic debate that shows no sign of abating. An increasing awareness of the biased and partial nature of Western historical discourse, which often displaces and excludes, has led theorists to probe the multifaceted, discursive nature of history. The decolonization movements of the twentieth century—in particular the bloody Franco-Algerian war of 1954-62—have been linked to the birth of poststructuralism and its deconstruction of Eurocentric modes of seeing and representing the world.¹⁴ The field of postcolonialism, itself heavily indebted to poststructuralist thought,¹⁵ is specifically concerned with the ethics of remembering the marginalized and subaltern Other

¹² Bartov, Grossman, and Nolan, p. xviii.

¹³ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 8.

¹⁴ Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004 [1990]), p. 32. See also Debra Kelly, 'An Unfinished Death: the Legacy of Albert Camus and the Work of Textual Memory in Contemporary European and Algerian literatures', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 10 (2007), 217-35 (p. 218).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32. See also Jane Hiddleston, *Poststructuralism and Postcoloniality: the Anxiety of Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 1; Emily Tomlinson, 'Assia Djebar: Speaking to the Living Dead', *Paragraph*, 26.3 (2003), 34-50 (p. 34).

whose history was erased or, at best, inscribed from the perspective of the I/eye of the colonizer. Building on the theory of poststructural thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, postcolonialism has been particularly attentive to the dissonant voices of the past. Like much post-Holocaust theory, in which survivor testimony plays a key role, postcolonialism emerged out of a desire to enable the victims of imperialism to ‘write back’ to the centre and confront the historical legacy of colonialism through a sustained dialogue with the past.¹⁶

The difficulties of this recuperative enterprise have been well documented by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her now-infamous essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in which she addresses the complexities of speaking on behalf of the subaltern subject.¹⁷ Theorists engaging with memories of the Holocaust have similarly voiced their own concerns, and Giorgio Agamben has written of the aporia of Holocaust testimony: those who experienced the gas chambers first-hand cannot return to articulate their suffering.¹⁸ One is thus left to ponder the ethical implications of speaking for—or witnessing on behalf of—such victims. How does one attempt to represent an experience that is seemingly unrepresentable? How can one do justice to the memory of its victims? If, for Marianne Hirsch, Theodor Adorno’s infamous avowal that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric ‘has haunted writing for the last fifty years’,¹⁹ the editors of *Crimes of War* certainly place ‘the bitter debate’ surrounding

¹⁶ See Bill Ashcroft, Gary Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989). The notion of the subaltern subject writing back to the centre has since been problematized by the very instability of the centre-periphery binary as well as by the increasingly transnational structure of global relations.

¹⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: a Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Harlow: Pearson, 1994), pp. 66-111

¹⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: the Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone, 1999), p. 33.

¹⁹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 23.

‘the production and consumption of representations of the Holocaust’ at the heart of the recent and ‘unprecedented memory boom’.²⁰

Much recent scholarship on memory and representation—especially traumatic memory—has engaged with psychoanalytical discourse, returning in particular to Sigmund Freud’s seminal 1917 essay ‘Mourning and Melancholia’.²¹ In this essay Freud carefully pits normative, healthy mourning against its pathological counterpart, melancholia. Yet in recent years, as theorists have increasingly rejected mourning on the basis that it engenders amnesia, melancholia has emerged as an ostensibly ethical form of remembrance that attends to many of the issues of representation outlined above. This thesis aims to problematize the recent veneration of melancholia by analyzing it within the context of postcolonial Algeria and, more specifically, within the novels of Algerian authors Assia Djebar, Yasmina Khadra, and Boualem Sansal.²² Described by Djebar in *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* as a ‘nation cherchant son cérémonial [...] de cimetière en cimetière’, Algeria is today a haunted space that remains scarred by its traumatic past.²³ The war of independence against the French (1954-62), as well as the more recent civil war of the 1990s, resulted in the deaths of thousands of Algerians, thus placing the politics of memory at the forefront of the nation’s agenda. And if the *guerre d’Algérie* remains an important reference for theorists concerned with the ethics of memory,²⁴ it similarly ‘figures frequently, together with its attendant dead, as a spectre and a returning ghost’ in Franco-Algerian literature.²⁵ By analyzing how Djebar, Khadra, and Sansal engage

²⁰ Bartov, Grossman, and Nolan, p. xviii.

²¹ Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, in *On the History of the Psycho-analytic Movement: Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 243-58

²² Yasmina Khadra is the *nom de plume* of Algerian author Mohammed Moulessehoul.

²³ Assia Djebar, *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 12.

²⁴ Best and Robson, p. 1.

²⁵ Kelly, ‘An Unfinished Death’, p. 219. See also Fiona Barclay, *Writing Postcolonial France: Haunting, Literature, and the Maghreb* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011), p. 135. Barclay contends that ‘the Algerian war forms a recurrent motif, a prism of violence bringing sharply into focus the blurred specters of the past’.

with the spectralized memories of the past, this thesis will reveal melancholia to be a potentially debilitating mnemonic model, suggesting instead the need for a more nuanced model of grief that moves beyond the Freudian binarism.

The Death of Mourning

The debate surrounding an ethical response to loss frequently centres upon Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia'. While both modes of grief develop in response to loss, mourning is a teleological process in which the ego eventually renounces its libidinal ties to the lost object, so that 'when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again'.²⁶ In melancholia, however, the ego is unable to accept that such a loss has occurred and in order to counteract reality it incorporates the lost object as a living entity within its own psychic topography. While Freud is at great pains to expose the pathological nature of melancholic object cathexes, much recent post-Freudian theory has subverted his original binary opposition, condemning mourning for the way in which it engenders amnesia, while simultaneously recuperating melancholia as a mode of remembrance. Writing in 2000, Slavoj Žižek summarizes this shift as follows:

With regard to mourning and melancholy, the predominant opinion is the following: Freud opposed normal mourning (the successful acceptance of a loss) to pathological melancholy (the subject persists in his or her narcissistic identification with the lost object). Against Freud, one should assert the conceptual and ethical primacy of melancholy. [...]. This story can be given a multitude of twists, from the queer one, which holds that homosexuals are those who retain fidelity to the lost or repressed identification with the same-sex libidinal object, to the post-colonial/ethnic one, which holds that [...] ethnic groups [...] should not renounce their tradition through mourning, but retain the melancholic attachment to their lost roots.²⁷

²⁶ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 245.

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, 'Melancholy and the Act', *Critical Inquiry*, 26 (2000), 657-81 (p. 658). Please note that the terms *melancholia* and *melancholy* are to be taken as interchangeable for the remainder of this thesis.

Žižek's pithy analysis demonstrates not only the widespread and transdisciplinary nature of the recent turn to melancholia—something which will be discussed in greater depth later on—but also the pervasiveness of Freud's original binary of mourning and melancholia. Despite the fact that Freud later revised his theory of mourning in *The Ego and the Id* (1923),²⁸ essentially reconceptualizing melancholia as the normative process by which the ego becomes the sum of its losses, much post-Freudian theory still tends to engage with his original 1917 treatise.²⁹ Nouri Gana, for instance, contends that in 'contemporary debates about the dynamics of remembering and mourning, Freud's clinically and analytically informed theoretical heritage is still of unsurpassable validity',³⁰ while Tammy Clewell argues that 'literary critics working in a range of historical periods and genres have persisted in using the Freudian model, though in refined form, to evaluate narrative representations of death, loss, and bereavement'.³¹ It is perhaps more apt, then, to speak of a reversal of, rather than an outright subversion of, Freud's foundational paradigm of mourning.

While Freud's 1917 essay centres upon individuated, private forms of grief, his hypothesis, as Žižek intimates, has been appropriated by academics across the humanities. The corollary is that today Freud's theory of mourning is frequently harnessed—or indeed critiqued—in relation to public or communal acts of remembrance as they pertain to a vast

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. by Joan Riviere (New York: Norton, 1990 [1923])

²⁹ Tammy Clewell, 'Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud's Psychoanalysis of Loss', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 52.1 (2004), 43-67 (p. 48); Sarah Brophy, *Witnessing AIDS: Writing, Testimony, and the Work of Mourning* (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 15-16; Greg Forter, *Gender, Race and Mourning in American Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 17.

³⁰ Nouri Gana, 'Remembering Forbidding Mourning: Repetition, Indifference, Melanxiety', *Mosaic*, 37.2 (2004), 59-78 (p. 59).

³¹ Clewell, 'Mourning Beyond Melancholia', p. 48.

array of socio-cultural identities.³² In an analysis of the contemporary memorialization of AIDS victims, for instance, Sarah Brophy contends:

The terms mourning and melancholia have served as crucial touchstones for critics seeking to understand how the AIDS pandemic has obliged artists and writers to address its lived experiences, its social consequences, its political ramifications as HIV infection and AIDS are imagined, remembered, and forgotten in the shifting terrain of cultural memory.³³

Much academic discourse on the politics of memory draws on the Freudian model to conceptualize collective modes of remembrance, often critiquing the way in which these acts of communal remembrance serve to exclude certain identities or groups.

In a recent examination of the political function of grief in nationalist discourse, for instance, Judith Butler argues that the modern nation-state is sustained through a politics of exclusion that is most apparent in public forms of mourning. Using the American media's portrayal of war casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq as a basis for her discussion, Butler demonstrates how 'governments [...] seek to regulate and control who will be publicly grievable and who will not'.³⁴ In regulating public displays of grief, the state discursively produces a 'hierarchy of grief' constituted by two opposing categories of people:³⁵ those whose lives are deemed to be 'grievable,' and those whose lives are 'ungrievable' because they were never fully acknowledged as human to begin with.³⁶ Madelyn Detloff has also theorized a similar model of grief, though she conceives of a 'three-tiered system of recognizing loss' that consists of 'publicly mourned loss, publicly recognized but privately

³² Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. xi-xii. See also Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 17; See also Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 35.

³³ Brophy, pp. 15-16. Monica B. Pearl has also analysed AIDS-related deaths in terms of mourning and melancholia in *Alien Tears: Mourning, Melancholia, and Identity in AIDS Literature* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 1999).

³⁴ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 38-39.

³⁵ Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 32.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

mourned loss, and disavowed loss'.³⁷ For Butler and Detloff, any form of state-sanctioned mourning is an acknowledgement that the people being mourned are recognized as human beings, that is, as 'grievable life, an icon for national self-recognition'.³⁸ As is the case with the ubiquitous Tomb of the Unknown Soldier,³⁹ certain lives are appropriated and constructed as symbolic bearers of the nation, and while they are mourned, celebrated even, other lives—those of ethnic minorities, AIDS sufferers, asylum seekers, among others—are excluded from the realm of signification and 'will not even qualify as "grievable"'.⁴⁰

In a dialogue with Spivak in *Who Sings the Nation-State?* Butler describes this state of non-being as that of being 'stateless within the state'.⁴¹ These individuals are '*produced* as stateless',⁴² she argues, becoming 'spectral humans [...] whose age, gender, race, nationality, and labor status not only disqualify them for citizenship but actively "qualify" them for statelessness'.⁴³ As a tool of the nation-state, mourning facilitates this discursive production of non-beings by perpetuating the nation's construction of its sovereign 'self' in opposition to its 'others'. This 'differential distribution of public grieving is a political issue of enormous significance', contends Butler, not least because it systematically reiterates long-established hegemonic structures that endorse some identities while simultaneously denigrating others.⁴⁴ Indeed, the subjugation, or non-recognition, of so-called minority identities whose human rights are not fully acknowledged in mainstream politics is further exacerbated in death by the

³⁷ Madelyn Detloff, *The Persistence of Modernism: Loss and Mourning in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 168.

³⁸ Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 34.

³⁹ For an analysis of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier as it relates to nationalism, consult Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 17.

⁴⁰ Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 32.

⁴¹ Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?: Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull, 2007), p. 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁴ Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 38.

socio-political regulation of public, communal acts of grief. ‘It is not just that a death is poorly marked,’ argues Butler, ‘but that it is unmarkable. Such a death vanishes, not into explicit discourse, but in the ellipses by which public discourse proceeds’.⁴⁵ For Butler, moreover, these individuals ‘cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never “were”’.⁴⁶ It is thus difficult to imagine a process by which the deaths of such people could even be worked through publically as loss, argues Patricia Rae, since they signify at the level of absence.⁴⁷ Indeed, asks Butler, ‘if someone is lost, and that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss, and how does mourning take place?’.⁴⁸ Or, put another way, how does one mourn ‘the loss of loss’?⁴⁹

From such an ambiguous position, it is possible to imagine how inaugurating a process of mourning, whatever form that may take, could be seen as affirmative action. If an ‘ungrievable life’ is one that ‘has never counted as a life at all’, then mourning could indeed function as a public form of resistance against social erasure since it goes some way to acknowledging that a life existed.⁵⁰ The problem lies, however, in mourning’s role in modes of forgetting. For many theorists grappling with the most appropriate way to remember the many victims of the twentieth century, Freudian mourning is considered ethically unsound because it enables the ego to accede to loss. As a linear process of grief, it enables the subject to detach its libidinal desires from the lost object and reinvest in a new one, effectively enacting a form of substitution.

⁴⁵ Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 35.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁷ Patricia Rae, ‘Introduction: Modernist Mourning’, in *Modernism and Mourning*, ed. by Patricia Rae (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp. 13-49 (p. 20).

⁴⁸ Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Judith Butler, ‘Afterword: After Loss, What Then?’, in *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, ed. by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 467-73 (p. 467).

⁵⁰ Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 38.

Jacques Derrida has famously spoken out against the normalizing impulses of Freudian mourning, arguing in *Béliers*, a tribute to the late German philosopher Hans Georg-Gadamer, that:

une certaine mélancolie doit protester encore contre le deuil normal. Elle ne doit jamais se résigner à l'introjection idéalisante. Elle doit s'emporter contre ce que Freud en dit avec une tranquille assurance, comme pour confirmer la norme de la normalité. La "norme" n'est autre que la bonne conscience d'une amnésie. Elle nous permet d'*oublier* que garder l'autre au-dedans de soi, *comme soi*, c'est déjà l'*oublier*. L'oubli commence là.⁵¹

For Derrida, the work of mourning is an idealistic mode of grief that operates according to a normative social framework that values the 'bonne conscience' of the mourner over the lost other. Mourning is no longer perceived as a healthy process that enables the ego to reinvest in a new love object, as Freud imagined, but is now tantamount to amnesia. In a recent effort to summarize Derrida's own work on mourning, Geoffrey Bennington added:

Broadly speaking, the problem is this: so-called "normal" or "successful" mourning consists in a process of *getting over it*, of recovering from the loss of the other by withdrawing one's investments or cathexes in that other back into the self, back into the service of the self, the ego. [...] this is a teleological process, the outcome of which is to *lose the loss*, to turn the loss into a profit, to come back to oneself, to show a return, in spite of the other's definitive departure. However "healthy" we might want to think this process is, this model of mourning seems extraordinarily self-involved and self-interested.⁵²

For Bennington, mourning is a self-oriented, narcissistic process that confirms and validates the autonomy of the subject. Loss must be surmounted and forgotten, thus rendering the lost object disposable and replaceable. As Žižek puts it, 'Mourning is a kind of betrayal, the second killing of the (lost) object',⁵³ while David Eng and Shinhee Han similarly conceive mourning as a form of forgetting, vehemently arguing that the 'mourner is perfectly content with killing off the lost object, declaring it to be dead yet again within the domain of the

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, *Béliers: le dialogue ininterrompu entre deux infinis, le poème* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), p. 74.

⁵² Geoffrey Bennington, 'In the Event', in *Derrida's Legacies: Literature and Philosophy* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 26-55 (p. 29). See also Peggy Kamuf, *To Follow: the Wake of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 2.

⁵³ Žižek, p. 658.

psyche'.⁵⁴ This second, emblematic death brought about by mourning is seen to be particularly problematic in the case of 'ungrievable lives' or victims of dehumanizing discourse, such as the Jews under Nazism. As Barbara Engelking writes in *Holocaust and Memory*, there is a widespread 'fear' amongst survivors that "'completed mourning" would mean forgetting the dead'.⁵⁵

In *L'Écorce et le noyau* the psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok build on the metapsychology of Freud and Sandor Ferenczi to theorize 'introjection', which corresponds to Freudian mourning, and 'incorporation', which is akin to melancholia.⁵⁶ Notably, Abraham and Torok view introjection as a linguistic process in which the lost object is replaced in language. Just as 'les mots peuvent remplacer la présence maternelle',⁵⁷ substituting the loss of the mother with words (normally via the breast), so introjection occurs when the subject 'Apprend[re] à remplir de mots le vide de la bouche'.⁵⁸ Mourning is thus a substitutive or metaphorical process that entails articulating loss in language and locating it beyond the psyche. Such a process, to return to Freud, enables 'the ego [...] to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished'.⁵⁹ Notably this conceptualization of mourning as a form of exteriorization can be extended to public memorial sites or, in the words of Pierre Nora, cultural *lieux de mémoire*.⁶⁰ While public memorials are often equated with remembrance, James Young suggests that they can engender amnesia as they divest

⁵⁴ David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, 'A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia', in *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, ed. by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 343-71 (p. 365). See also Bianca Del Villano, *Ghostly Alterities: Spectrality and Contemporary Literatures in English* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag), p. 82.

⁵⁵ Barbara Engelking, *Holocaust and Memory: the Experience of the Holocaust and its Consequences* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), p. 249.

⁵⁶ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *L'Écorce et le noyau* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), p. 233.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 262-63.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁵⁹ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 255.

⁶⁰ Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984)

people of the obligation to remember.⁶¹ Not only do such memorials enact the work of mourning on behalf of the individual or group but, mirroring the process of linguistic exteriorization, they do so by externalizing loss outside the self. Young's premise derives from his sustained analysis of Holocaust memorials throughout the world and, in this particular instance, the effect of forgetting is not presented as the aim of such memorials, but rather as the inevitable corollary of what has been termed elsewhere 'the consolatory paradox of the monument'.⁶² The historian Jay Winter is rather more resolute, however, maintaining that 'war memorials, with their material representation of names and losses, are there to help in the necessary art of forgetting'.⁶³ Drawing upon Freudian theory, he reasons that:

war memorials, and in particular the reading of the names of the fallen, and the touching of those statues or those names, [are] means of avoiding crushing melancholia, [and] of passing through mourning [...]. Ritual here is a means of forgetting, as much as commemoration.⁶⁴

This has particular ramifications for public memorials or remembrance days that seem to regard the terms *mourning* and *remembrance* almost synonymously.⁶⁵

Implicit in these socio-political critiques, then, is the idea that mourning enables amnesia and functions as an agent of the status quo. In a discussion of the recent theoretical renunciation of Freudian mourning, Rae thus suggests that:

At the heart of what has been called a "depathologizing" of melancholia [...] has been a sense that such "work" [the work of mourning] amounts to a forgetting of, or an

⁶¹ James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 5. See also Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998). In a discussion of Holocaust memorials she states, 'It may be, then, that at times we have begun to remember so as to forget' (p. 202).

⁶² Watkin, p. 77. See also Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). She argues that 'memorials on the whole (not always of course) support the imaginary community and reproduce the status quo' (p. 17).

⁶³ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 115.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁶⁵ The AIDS Memorial Quilt, for instance, with its focus on the ritualistic naming of those who have died, might be regarded as enabling amnesia rather than promoting commemoration.

abdication of responsibility for, what has been lost, and that this amnesia has been too often demanded and paid in the interests of preserving the *status quo*.⁶⁶

Mourning is regarded as defeatist and distinctly apolitical since, as a ‘consolatory, symbolic valuation of the dead’, it enables the living to forget those they should be fighting for.⁶⁷ For Clewell, ‘consolation [...] facilitates the forgetting of lost others and lost histories by insisting on closure’,⁶⁸ while for R. Clifton Spargo, ‘consolation always involves a relenting of the hypothesis of agency’, inevitably thwarting the potential for political activism.⁶⁹ Condemning mourning’s ‘compensatory mechanism[s] of idealization and mythic resolution’,⁷⁰ Spargo goes on to maintain that we must be ‘on guard against the movement toward consolation’.⁷¹ Speaking on behalf of his own ‘community of AIDS activists’, Douglas Crimp is also forced to conclude that ‘mourning troubles us’.⁷² It is considered ‘suspect’, he argues, and ‘seen from an activist perspective, indulgent, sentimental, [and] defeatist’.⁷³ For Crimp, moreover, mourning will always be considered problematic because it ‘promises a return to normalcy that [homosexuals and AIDS sufferers] were never granted in the first place’.⁷⁴ As a normative, legitimizing mode of grief, the Freudian work of mourning endorses a form of social cohesion and acceptance that never was, thus threatening to assimilate the lost individual within a disingenuous, homogenizing cultural framework. Writing about AIDS memoirs, Sarah Brophy similarly contends that:

the most pressing question for the reader may be how *not* to mourn—that is, how not to become caught up in mourning as compensator, as an aggressive action of normalizing

⁶⁶ Rae, p. 18.

⁶⁷ R. Clifton Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 13.

⁶⁸ Tammy Clewell, *Mourning, Modernism, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 3.

⁶⁹ Spargo, p. 37.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷² Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT, 2002), p. 131.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

closure, even while there may be no evading the law that commands us to mourn, and to mourn “well”.⁷⁵

Mourning is thus regarded as a totalizing palliative that maintains the status quo by inscribing its lost objects within a narrative of substitution.

The paradoxical status of mourning as both a marker of commemoration and forgetting is particularly pertinent to an understanding of the politics of newly emergent nation-states. In *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961) Frantz Fanon ends by reiterating the utopian desire for a new mode of thinking that would accompany the emergent postcolonial nation.⁷⁶ More recently, writing of decolonization and the *hexagone*, Kristin Ross has ventured that a ‘utopian rhetoric of creation—clean slates and tabula rasa—dominated the writings of anticolonialist writers intent on analyzing the colonial situation and calling for its overthrow’.⁷⁷ Tropes of newness permeated the decolonization movement as pro-independence groups sought to carve out a new socio-political space unfettered by colonial ideology. As Leela Gandhi argues:

The emergence of anti-colonial and “independent” nation-States after colonialism is frequently accompanied by the desire to forget the colonial past. This “will-to-forget” takes a number of historical forms, and is impelled by a variety of cultural and political motivations. Principally, postcolonial amnesia is symptomatic of the urge for historical self-invention or the need to make a new start—to erase painful memories of colonial subordination.⁷⁸

As Gandhi makes clear, the need to establish a postcolonial culture and politics distinct from the colonial master’s manifests itself via a process of amnesia, in which traces of the colonizer’s heritage are eliminated or repressed. Thus while Fanon’s discourse clearly differs from that of the neo-colonial nationalists, whose repressive measures he anticipated before his death in 1961, the latter’s actions were nonetheless born of the same fetishization of the new.

⁷⁵ Brophy, p. 21.

⁷⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 376.

⁷⁷ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1995), p. 158.

⁷⁸ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: an Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 4.

This postcolonial ‘will-to-forget’ invoked by Gandhi characterizes the identity politics of postcolonial Algeria, where the dominant *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) has, since independence in 1962, systematically sought to repress cultural pluralism in favour of a unified Arab heritage. The nationalized process of Arabization attempted to purge the country of its Francophone heritage, whilst also diminishing the influence of putative minority languages and cultures, including Berber. The FLN has manipulated historical memory, devaluing plurality and heterogeneity in favour of a monocausal, official version of history that serves to legitimize its own hegemony. This falsification of history has instituted a form of cultural and historical amnesia, as historian Benjamin Stora articulates: ‘L’histoire officielle a institué des repères, construit sa propre légitimité, effacé toute démarche pluraliste. Elle a, en fait, fabriqué de l’oubli’.⁷⁹ State-led identity politics and history in postcolonial Algeria is thus founded on a narrative of forgetting and untruth which is instantiated via a series of public memorials that aim to engender collective amnesia. Whether it is through state-sanctioned funerals executed in classical Arabic, or via public memorials such as the *Monument du martyr* (Maqam E’chahid), erected in 1982 in Algiers by President Boumediene to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of independence, processes of mourning have played a pivotal role in the simultaneous fabrication of collective memory and amnesia.⁸⁰

War memorials such as the *Monument du martyr* help bolster the self-consolidating image of victimhood deployed by the FLN and memorialize the war through the framework of martyrdom. The inter- and intra-tribal conflicts of the *guerre d’Algérie* have been buried beneath a façade of unity that dictates what and who should be remembered. The postcolonial

⁷⁹ Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et l’oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Découverte, 1991), p. 304.

⁸⁰ This ideology is, of course, not without its challenges. My point is not that the Algerian population as a whole has forgotten or mis-remembered the past, but that the FLN government has attempted to fabricate history via processes of mourning and memorialization.

theorist Ranjana Khanna is particularly critical of the role and positioning of the *Monument du martyr* within Algeria's political landscape, conceiving it as an obstruction to genuine anamnesis:

Algeria's erection of the huge memorial that dominates the melancholic landscape is in a sense also the burial of the idea of sovereignty as self-determination of the people. In its place, and in this combination of commemoration and celebration, it is the very disposability of bodies that is celebrated. The extraordinarily diverse accounts of how many died—between 800, 000 to 1.5 million—registers (sic) indeed that bodies do not count: they are born and die with no census to mark the nationalist agenda.⁸¹

The metonymic monument to the martyrs of the war of independence commemorates the nation rather than its war dead, constructing a glorious image of Algeria that is greater than its parts. In this way the memorial can be seen to actively conceal rather than remember those it purports to evoke. Khanna condemns the fact that the singularity of the victims is rendered obsolete; what is ostensibly important is the symbolic value of the dead, thus rendering the precise number of victims insignificant. Djebbar's critique of the relationship between mourning practices and Algerian nationalism in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (1995) resonates with Khanna's condemnation of the disposability of bodies. Denouncing the FLN's manipulation of the Algerian War she writes:

dans leurs discours, ils convoqueront à tout propos les morts—à force de répéter “un million de morts,” ils ne prêtent attention qu'au quantitatif [...] Ainsi s'amplifia la caricature d'un passé où indistinctement se mêlaient héros sublimes et meurtriers fraticides.⁸²

The repetitive and anaesthetizing discourse employed by the government to discuss the contentious war of independence masks the real human cost of Algeria's losses, enacting on a semantic level the amnesia wrought by tangible memorials. Thus while the nation-state might mark its 'grievable lives', it does not attend to the singularity of the individuals being remembered.

⁸¹ Ranjana Khanna, 'Post-Palliative: Coloniality's Affective Dissonance', *Postcolonial Text*, 2.1 (2006), n. pag. (para. 39 of 39).

⁸² Djebbar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, pp. 135-36.

Towards Millennial Melancholia

While the work of mourning is synonymous with closure and resolution, theorists have also questioned whether it can actually be completed.⁸³ Such an issue arises out of the poststructuralist scepticism towards ontology and its concomitant deconstruction of what Jean-François Lyotard famously referred to as ‘métadiscours’.⁸⁴ As William Watkin asserts, tropes of ‘absence, loss, otherness and death’ are today so ubiquitous that they have come to signify ‘a new quasi-metaphysical philosophy of being’.⁸⁵ Eurocentric discourses asserting universal truths, plenitude, and finitude have been renounced in favour of ‘poststructural hauntology’, which figures history and writing as necessarily partial and haunted.⁸⁶ In particular the Derridean concept of ‘hantologie’ put forth in *Spectres de Marx* (1993) gives expression to the idea of a spectralized temporality that destabilizes binaries such as here/there, past/present, absence/presence.⁸⁷

⁸³ Brophy, p. 19; Rae, p. 16.

⁸⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979), p. 7.

⁸⁵ Watkin, p. 14.

⁸⁶ Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, and the Return of the Dead* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 11.

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p. 31. Notably, this ‘poststructuralist hauntology’ has emerged in conjunction with a generalized, transdisciplinary melancholy. Several critics have analysed in detail the melancholic nature of recent scholarship which, anxious over its own future, remains unable to renounce its putative death. Concomitantly, scholars have called attention to the relationship between melancholia and what can be described more generally as ‘post-theory’, that is, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and so forth. See for example, Patricia Ewick, ‘Postmodern Melancholia’, *Law and Society Review*, 26 (1992), 755-63; Ian Baucom, ‘Mournful Histories: Narratives of Postimperial Melancholy’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 42 (1996), 259-88; Eli Sorensen, ‘Postcolonial Melancholia’, *Paragraph*, 30 (2007), 65–81; Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Eli Park Sorensen, *Postcolonial Studies and the Literary: Theory, Interpretation, and the Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Paul A. Bové, *In the Wake of Theory* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1992); Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2004); *Theory after ‘Theory’* (London: Routledge, 2011), ed. by Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge; Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.11; Khanna, ‘Post-Palliative’, n. pag; Schiesari, p. 2; Rosello, in *The Reparative in Narratives*, has also spoken of today’s ‘disciplinary melancholy’ (p. 3).

LaCapra subsumes these generalized hauntological tropes under the category of transhistorical or ‘structural trauma’.⁸⁸ In contrast to ‘historical trauma’, which is real and tangible and can, therefore, be localized and mourned, structural lack is ahistorical and speaks to the non-being of contemporary metaphysics.⁸⁹ Importantly, this poststructural theorization of absence and loss has been viewed by Greg Forter as a precursor to the contemporary rehabilitation of melancholia. In a discussion of modernism and American literature, Forter argues that it is possible to ‘trace a conceptual line’ from ‘the emphasis on constitutive or “structural” (insurmountable) bereavements in Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis’ through to ‘the “melancholia thesis” in contemporary mourning theory’.⁹⁰ The postmodernist rendering of language and being as ghostly, partial, and fragmented has thus helped foster the conviction that Freudian mourning is impossible, ultimately encouraging the widespread emergence of what we might term ‘millennial melancholia’.

For Jacky Bowring, in a recent survey of melancholia from Burton to Freud, the ‘early twenty-first century is another era of melancholic intensity’.⁹¹ If Bowring’s comment smacks of hyperbole—itself a symptom of melancholia—her thesis is, in fact, nothing new. Christina Wald has also outlined the ‘contemporary cultural preoccupation with melancholia’,⁹² while David Eng and David Kazanjian have postulated ‘an intellectual and political genealogy of

⁸⁸ Dominick LaCapra, ‘Trauma, Absence, Loss’, *Critical Inquiry*, 25.4 (1999), 696-727 (p. 699). See also Peter Ramadanovic who marks the difference between ‘abstract trauma’ and ‘concrete trauma’ in *Forgetting Futures: On Memory, Trauma, and Identity* (Lanham, MD; Oxford: Lexington Books, 2001), p. 111.

⁸⁹ LaCapra, ‘Trauma, Absence, Loss’, p. 700.

⁹⁰ Forter, p. 10. For a more in-depth analysis of modernist literature and melancholy, see Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: the Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁹¹ Jacky Bowring, *A Field Guide to Melancholy* (Harpending: Oldcastle Books, 2008), p. 84.

⁹² Christina Wald, *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia: Performance Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 3.

loss through melancholia'.⁹³ Elsewhere, Eng has examined the 'critical reevaluation of melancholia'⁹⁴ in academic discourse, and both Forter and Žižek have written at length of a 'recuperated melancholia'⁹⁵ and the 'rehabilitation of melancholia' respectively.⁹⁶ If the recent transdisciplinary proliferation of so-called 'postmodern melancholias' seems somewhat surprising, it is by no means unprecedented.⁹⁷ Indeed, as Wald contends, "'melancholia" is a historically variable model that has been used by medical, artistic, and popular discourses for more than two millennia'.⁹⁸ Eng and Kazanjian similarly describe melancholia as 'a theoretical concept with a long and expansive pedigree dating to classical times'.⁹⁹ As early as the fourth century B.C., melancholia was understood within the context of humour theory, with Hippocrates describing it as an excess of black bile leading to symptoms such as lethargy and dejection.¹⁰⁰ In spite of its pathological nature, however, black bile was simultaneously regarded as a pathway to intellectual and creative genius, leaving Aristotle to ponder why the most outstanding of men were 'melancholic' and 'infected by the diseases arising from the black bile'.¹⁰¹ This Aristotelian connection between genius and melancholia experienced a revival during both the Italian Renaissance and the English Romanticist movement,¹⁰² but this

⁹³ David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, 'Introduction: Mourning Remains', in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 1-28 (p. 3).

⁹⁴ David L. Eng, 'Melancholia in the Late Twentieth Century', *Signs*, 25 (2000), 1275-81 (p. 1276).

⁹⁵ Forter, p. 19.

⁹⁶ Žižek, p. 659.

⁹⁷ Schiesari, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Wald, p. 161.

⁹⁹ Eng and Kazanjian, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ Wald, pp. 160-61.

¹⁰¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 12.

¹⁰² Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: from Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 15.

celebration of melancholia was tempered by the advent of psychoanalysis, which figured melancholia as a pathological response to loss.¹⁰³

For Jonathan Flatley, in his monograph on melancholia through the ages:

[What] distinguish[es] late nineteenth- and early twenty-first century understandings of melancholia from earlier ones [...] is the connection made around that time between depressive melancholia and the problem of loss, a connection crystallized in Freud's now famous argument first outlined in his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia".¹⁰⁴

In this essay Freud asserts that the melancholic, unlike the mourner, grieves 'a loss of a more ideal kind',¹⁰⁵ stemming from 'the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on'.¹⁰⁶ In contrast to mourning, 'in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious', in melancholia 'one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost'.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, 'even if the patient is aware of the loss [...] he knows *whom* he has lost, but not *what* he has lost in him'.¹⁰⁸ And while the mourner endeavours to transcend loss, the melancholic subject cannot accept that such a loss has occurred. Instead, he incorporates the lost object within his psychic topography, ultimately identifying as the object.¹⁰⁹ If, in mourning, the world has become 'poor and empty', in melancholia it is the ego itself that is deemed worthless.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Although Freud resolutely figured melancholia as a pathological response to loss, in 'Mourning and Melancholia' he nevertheless argues that, 'When in his heightened self-criticism he describes himself as petty, egoistic, dishonest, lacking in independence [...] it may be, so far as we know, that he has come pretty near to understanding himself; we only wonder why a man has to be ill before he can be accessible to a truth of this kind' (p. 246).

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 245.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

While scholars and practitioners working within the context of psychoanalysis still tend to view melancholia as a pathological illness to be surmounted,¹¹¹ the recent interdisciplinary turn to melancholia poses a substantial challenge to this. Given melancholia's long and complex history, the recent revival of 'black bile' is perhaps unremarkable. What makes this different, however, is the sheer prevalence of the concept in contemporary theory and its close relationship to socio-political and ethical issues. No longer a marker of masculine intellect or depression, the theoretical underpinnings of melancholic object relations have been deployed to theorize the psychology of minority group identities, to account for contemporary cultural and racial formations, and to understand homosexual object-attachment, amongst other things.¹¹² Though the object of their studies may differ, contemporary theorists of melancholia all tend to stress the ethico-political usefulness of the concept:

the revaluation of melancholia [...] is compatible with those writings that produced the impression of an ethical turn in postmodernism from the playfulness of "anything goes" to the investigation of political and ethical issues.¹¹³

As Wald articulates, the recent depathologization of melancholia is linked to the ethics of philosophers such as Levinas and Derrida, both of whom have sought to theorize modes of remembrance that would attend to the alterity and singularity of 'le tout autre'.¹¹⁴

In *Béliers* Derrida explicitly refers to melancholia as a means of safeguarding the alterity of the other, conceiving of an ethical form of incorporation in which the other exists within the self *as other*: 'je dois (c'est l'éthique même) porter l'autre en moi pour lui être

¹¹¹ See, for example, Gordon Parker and others, 'Discriminating Melancholic and Non-Melancholic Depression by Prototype Clinical Features', *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 144.3 (2013), 199-207.

¹¹² See, for instance, Eng and Han, pp. 343-71; Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis and Assimilation and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹¹³ Wald, p.163.

¹¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'Roland Barthes', in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), pp. 57-97 (p. 67).

fidèle, pour en respecter l'altérité singulière'.¹¹⁵ He develops this idea in his discussion of mourning in *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*, where he not only argues against mourning but postulates that 'le vrai deuil [est] impossible'.¹¹⁶ In order to respect the singular nature of the other, it is necessary to embrace a paradoxical form of resistant mourning in which 'la réussite échoue' and 'l'échec réussit'.¹¹⁷ This aporia suggests that it is imperative that any form of normalizing, 'healthy' mourning fails if the other is to avoid being consumed and assimilated as part of the self. Concomitantly, 'l'intériorisation qui avorte, c'est à la fois le respect de l'autre comme autre, une sorte de tendre rejet, un mouvement de renoncement qui le laisse seul, dehors, là-bas, dans sa mort, hors de nous'.¹¹⁸ A melancholic relationship with the dead other, in which he exists distinct from the self, is thus conceived as an ethical response to death as it both precludes the forgetting of loss via introjection and respects the singularity of each loss.

Like Derrida, Spargo similarly argues that 'a resistant and incomplete mourning stands for an ethical acknowledgement of—or perhaps a ceding to—the radical alterity of the other whom one mourns'.¹¹⁹ Speaking of 'a resistant strain of mourning', he suggests that 'it is precisely because our cultural modes of memory so often neglect the other whom they would remember that unresolved mourning becomes a dissenting act, a sign of irremissible ethical meaning'.¹²⁰ Most importantly for Spargo, however, is the idea that this protection of the other denotes a level of ethical responsibility that both precedes, and is independent of, the possibility of retrospective action, since the grieving subject preserves the lost object all the

¹¹⁵ Derrida, *Béliers*, p. 74.

¹¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), p. 54.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹¹⁹ Spargo, p. 13.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

while knowing that retroactive agency is impossible. Drawing upon a Levinasian notion of ethics that dissociates ethical action from morality and utilitarianism, Spargo suggests that melancholia challenges the notion of morality as a concept with a fixed, intrinsic value. What might be considered a morally informed deed or act is normally only executed on the basis that it will achieve a tangible result, which is to say that morality, as a culturally inscribed value, is dependent upon the likelihood that an act will succeed. Conversely, ‘insofar as it supposes an imaginative protection of the other who has already been lost’, melancholia functions independently of the possibility of agency, and thus its protection is seen to be wholly ethical.¹²¹ While Spargo concedes that melancholia cannot effect change retrospectively, he nonetheless contends that it generates the potential for reform, since ‘the specter of failure, the incapability of agency, inspires future action’.¹²² Whereas mourning ‘always involves a relenting of the hypothesis of agency’,¹²³ the melancholic, ultimately futile, desire to protect the other is paradoxically mobilizing as this desire can be projected into the future, with quite different consequences.

For advocates of melancholia, then, the possibility of future action stems from one’s ability to remember the dead as well as one’s desire to act on behalf of their memory. Melancholia is often mobilized on predominantly social and political grounds, particularly where minoritarian groups and identities are concerned. Thus, in Forter’s words, “‘Melancholia’ becomes [...] a synonym for “politically enabling remembering”, or else for a form of grief that’s to be cherished for its resolutions and refusal of closure’.¹²⁴ He develops this further, contending that:

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹²² Ibid., p. 37.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 37.

¹²⁴ Forter, p. 11.

[Theorists] have sought to ground political grievances in socially induced loss or injury [...]. Their overwhelming tendency has been to celebrate melancholia as a counter-memorial strategy of resistance; they construe melancholia, that is, as a memorial mechanism for keeping alive what the dominant culture encourages us to forget.¹²⁵

This politicized variant of melancholia is evident in scholarship on the memory of the Holocaust and in theorizations of postcolonial and homosexual identities.¹²⁶ Eng and Han thus view the ‘preservation of the threatened object [...] as a type of ethical hold on the part of the melancholic ego’, effectively safeguarding minoritarian identities from erasure.¹²⁷ This ethical protection of the object translates into a form of political protest for, as Eng and Han go on to suggest, ‘There is a militant refusal on the part of the ego—better yet, a series of egos, to let go, and this militant refusal is at the heart of [its] productive potentials’.¹²⁸ In a similar manner, Rae, drawing on tangible examples of politicized grief in Argentina, Serbia, and the United States, has examined the possibility that ‘chronic public grieving is the only route to justice’,¹²⁹ while Ranjana Khanna argues that ‘Melancholia becomes the basis for an ethico-political understanding of colonial pasts, postcolonial presents, and utopian futures’.¹³⁰ Elsewhere, in her analysis of race-relations in the United States, Anne Anlin Cheng argues that the ‘model of melancholia can help us comprehend grief [...] as a dynamic process with both coercive and transformative potentials for political imagination’.¹³¹ The movement from

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 10,

¹²⁶ See, for example, F.R. Ankersmit, ‘Remembering the Holocaust: Mourning and Melancholia’, in *Reclaiming Memory: American Representations of the Holocaust* (Turku: University of Turku, 1997), pp. 62-86 (p. 82); Eric Sonstroem, ‘Repetition and the Work of Hypertextual Mourning: Ryman’s 253 and the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt’, *Invisible Culture*, 8 (2004), n.pag.

¹²⁷ Eng and Han, p. 365.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 365.

¹²⁹ Rae, p. 19.

¹³⁰ Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 30.

¹³¹ Cheng, p. xi. See also Stanley Cavell, ‘Benjamin and Wittgenstein: Signals and Affinities’, *Critical Inquiry*, 25.2 (1999), 235-46 (p. 246); Eng, p. 1280.

‘grief to grievance’¹³² is seen to enable the living to protest on behalf of the disenfranchised or effaced other, generating ‘unpredictable, political aspects’ as it does so.¹³³

In his reflections on Derrida, Bennington has also stressed the importance of an ethical strain of ‘militant melancholy’,¹³⁴ and it is precisely this theorization of melancholia that has led theorists such as José Muñoz to argue that the concept enables ‘blacks’ and ‘queers’ to reconstruct their identities and fight against oppression.¹³⁵ Brophy’s analysis of AIDS-related deaths develops this to reveal how melancholia becomes a vehicle for political protest:

The epidemic’s ghosts protest through the voices of their spokespersons against their being exorcized, rendered untroublesome by a public rhetoric of AIDS that would fast-forward public consciousness to a sometime future world, one purified of the scourge and its “victims”, a world, in other words, purified of grief and of mourning.¹³⁶

The ghostly incorporated object speaks through the living ego in which it now resides, thus inaugurating a politicized form of prosopopoeia. The public act of speaking out against the social and political erasure of AIDS sufferers can be seen to circumvent the way in which ‘discourse itself effects violence through omission’, and hence it is possible to see how melancholia could be perceived to engender political change.¹³⁷ As Butler argues, ‘Open grieving is bound up with outrage, and outrage in the face of injustice or indeed of unbearable loss has enormous political potential’.¹³⁸ This political, melancholic outrage, while moving towards a more inclusive public rhetoric, also forecloses mourning, and hence it prevents the

¹³² Cheng, p. 3.

¹³³ Eng and Kazanjian, p. 3.

¹³⁴ Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 8.

¹³⁵ José E. Muñoz, ‘Photographies of Mourning: Melancholia and Ambivalence in Van Der Zee, Mapplethorpe, and *Looking for Langston*’, in *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*, ed. by Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 337-58 (pp. 355-56). See also Michael Moon, ‘Memorial Rags’, in *Professions of Desire: Lesbian and Gay Studies in Literature*, ed. by George E. Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman (New York: The Modern Languages Association of America, 1995), pp. 233-40.

¹³⁶ Brophy, p. 8.

¹³⁷ Butler, *Prekarious Life*, p. 34. It is important to note here that Butler’s treatment of melancholia is much more ambiguous than this citation might suggest. Her analysis of melancholia will be dealt with in more depth later on in this introduction.

¹³⁸ Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 39.

social assimilation of the lost object so feared by Crimp's AIDS activists. It is through its rebuttal of closure, then, suggests Spargo, that 'melancholia interrogates the symbolic social structures that contain and reduce the meaning of the other who is being lamented'.¹³⁹ The lost object is not reduced to the level of mere thanatope, but exists within the interstices of normalizing cultural modes of production that aim to categorize and limit bodies and identities. Considered in this way, melancholia is seen to preclude the double forgetting, or negation, of those individuals whose lives were never considered to be grievable to begin with.

If melancholia has emerged as a dominant theoretical paradigm in recent years, tropes of haunting and spectrality have also become increasingly pervasive across the humanities. For Avery Gordon, David Punter, and Jeffrey Weinstock, the contemporary era is primarily a haunted one,¹⁴⁰ while Colin Davis has observed that 'the relation to the dead has become an important trend in critical and psychoanalytical work'.¹⁴¹ In a similar vein, Roger Luckhurst has written convincingly of 'the discourse of spectralized modernity',¹⁴² and theorists such as Rey Chow and Harry Harootunian have figured poststructuralism and history as ghostly entities.¹⁴³ Paralleling the rehabilitation of melancholia, this critical shift towards haunting and loss is bound up with the poststructural openness to the spectralized elements of culture, language, and history, as well as poststructuralism's ethical attentiveness towards the ghostly

¹³⁹ Spargo, p. 11.

¹⁴⁰ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 7; David Punter, 'Introduction: of Apparitions', in *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 1-8 (p. 1); David Punter, *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 61.

¹⁴¹ Davis, *Haunted Subjects*, p. 8.

¹⁴² Roger Luckhurst, 'The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the "Spectral Turn"', *Textual Practice*, 16.3 (2002), 526-45 (p. 528).

¹⁴³ Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2006); Harry Harootunian, 'Remembering the Historical Present', *Critical Inquiry*, 33.3 (2007), 471-94.

other.¹⁴⁴ In particular, it is Derrida's seminal text *Spectres de Marx* that has put theories of haunting firmly on the academic map. Indeed, Derrida's thesis has been so influential that it has been embraced by critics across the humanities,¹⁴⁵ propagating, in the words of Davis, 'a minor academic industry'.¹⁴⁶ *Hantologie*, as we have seen, proffers a challenge to conventional ontology, enacting the ghostly disruption of dominant epistemologies and destabilizing putative binary oppositions such as here/there, absence/presence, and past/present.¹⁴⁷ Importantly, rather than revealing an inherent truth, the spectre's absent presence destabilizes us and, in Davis's terms, 'may open us up to the experience of secrecy as such'.¹⁴⁸ The deconstructive figure of the spectre therefore points to instances of lack, absence, and liminality, marking the gaps and silences that continue to haunt modernity. For Sam Durrant, then, deconstruction is largely opposed to psychoanalytical theory because:

Psychoanalysis, with its commitment to the well-being of the subject, encourages us to exorcise our ghosts, to come to terms with loss and move on. Deconstruction, with its commitment to the other, to that which "unhinges" the subject, urges us to learn to live with ghosts.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Davis, *Haunted Subjects*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Marisa Parham, *Haunting and Displacement in African American Literature* (London: Routledge, 2008); Jeffrey Weinstock, *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imaginary* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p. 4; Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 384-92; Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Jodey Castricano, *Cryptomimesis: the Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing* (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Gordon, p. 58.

¹⁴⁶ Colin Davis, 'Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms', *French Studies*, 59.3 (2005), 373-79 (p. 378). In 'The Contemporary London Gothic', Luckhurst also references 'the critical language of spectral or haunted modernity that has become a cultural-critical shorthand in the wake of *Specters of Marx*' (p. 528). See also Barclay, who contends that, 'With the publication of *Specters of Marx* (1994 [1993]) and his introduction of the concept of hauntology Jacques Derrida single-handedly rehabilitated ghosts, transforming them into an acceptable element of high theory' (p. xi). Debra Kelly, in 'An Unfinished Death' (2007), also notes the 'prevalence of the theme and of the terminology of haunting in contemporary literary and cultural analysis', arguing that, "'Hauntology" as it has sometimes come to be called following Jacques Derrida's term, often takes as its fundamental reference Derrida's own work in *Spectres de Marx*' (p. 218).

¹⁴⁷ Ruth Parkin-Gounelas, 'Anachrony and Anotopia: Spectres of Marx, Derrida and Gothic Fiction', in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 127-43 (p. 128); Best and Robson, p. 4; Michael F. O'Riley, 'Postcolonial Haunting: Anxiety, Affect, and the Situated Encounter', *Postcolonial Text*, 3 (2007), n.pag; Barclay, p. xv.

¹⁴⁸ Davis, 'Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms', p. 377.

¹⁴⁹ Durrant, p. 9. See also Davis, 'Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms', pp. 378-79.

Durrant, like Davis, articulates a key difference between deconstruction and psychoanalysis, namely that deconstruction is concerned with unrepresentable traces, whereas psychoanalysis is about eliciting speech and exorcizing the ghosts of the past.¹⁵⁰ Yet such a distinction is only tenable if we consider psychoanalysis to be synonymous with mourning, thus overlooking contemporary theorizations of melancholia.

Yet more than that, despite the fact that Derridean deconstruction and *hantologie* underscore the gaps and silences inherent to discourse, *Spectres de Marx* is often read as an injunction to converse with the ghosts of history and to heed what they have to say. In other words, Derrida's text has inspired theorists to attend to the spectres of the past and to listen to their narratives. In particular Derrida advocates us to engage in dialogue with the phantom:

apprendre à vivre *avec* les fantômes, dans l'entretien, la compagnie ou le compagnonnage, dans le commerce sans commerce des fantômes. À vivre autrement, et mieux. Non pas mieux, plus justement. Mais *avec* eux. Pas d'*être-avec* l'autre, pas de *socius* sans cet *avec-là* qui nous rend l'*être-avec* en général plus énigmatique que jamais. Et cet être-avec les spectres serait aussi, non seulement mais aussi une *politique* de la mémoire, de l'héritage, et des générations.¹⁵¹

Having emphasized the intersubjective nature of spectrality, Derrida then goes on to suggest that this ghostly dialogue enacts an ethical form of justice:

Il faut parler *du* fantôme, voire *au* fantôme et *avec* lui, dès lors qu'aucune éthique, aucune politique, révolutionnaire ou non, ne paraît possible et pensable et *juste*, qui ne reconnaisse à son principe le respect pour ces autres qui ne sont plus ou pour ces autres qui ne sont pas encore *là*, *présentement vivants*, qu'ils soient déjà morts ou qu'ils ne sont pas encore nés.¹⁵²

Hantologie is thus proffered as a form of ethical relationality with the dead, the living, and those who are not yet born, and the living must heed these spectres if any form of justice is to be possible. Unsurprisingly, Derridean *hantologie* has been embraced by critics and theorists

¹⁵⁰ For an excellent analysis of the difference between Derridean hauntology and Abraham and Torok's concept of the phantom, consult Davis, 'Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms'. Abraham and Torok's metapsychology will be discussed in more detail in Chapters One and Two.

¹⁵¹ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, p. 15.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

alike who explicitly engage with its ethical and political demands for justice. For Henriette Korthals Altes, ‘the [Derridean] notion of hauntology [...] has marked an ethical turn in the story of the ghost’,¹⁵³ while for Martine Delvaux, who situates spectrality in a feminist context, Derrida’s *Spectres de Marx* figures ‘une exigence éthique: ne pas enterrer les morts, ne pas oublier les fantômes, et les laisser nous hanter’.¹⁵⁴ Speaking of the importance of attending to the voices of the colonial past, Alfred López similarly invokes *Spectres de Marx*, paraphrasing Derrida to suggest that we need to ‘converse with ghosts, to keep an open ear to what they might ask us to bear witness to or do ourselves. And we must understand this as an irreducibly political task [...] in the name of justice’.¹⁵⁵ Avery Gordon too, in her work on haunting and sociology, references Derridean hauntology and speaks of ‘our need to reckon with hauntings and [...] ghosts *out of a concern for justice*’,¹⁵⁶ while Spivak, in an article devoted entirely to Derrida’s *Spectres de Marx*, calls for ‘justice as relation to the other’,¹⁵⁷ writing that ‘the ghost dance is an attempt to establish the ethical relation with history as such, ancestors real or imagined’.¹⁵⁸

Tropes of spectrality—and haunting more generally—are particularly abundant in the fields of ethnic studies and postcolonialism as theorists seek to give a voice to the excluded or marginalized ‘objects’ of predominantly Western historiography. López, for instance, sees ‘the postcolonial in terms of the metaphoric form of the Derridean specter’,¹⁵⁹ while Michael

¹⁵³ Henriette Korthals Altes, ‘Haunting Canons: Ethics of Mourning in *Vie Secrète* by Pascal Quignard’, in *Haunting Presences: Ghosts in French Literature and Culture*, ed. by Kate Griffiths and David Evans (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 151-66 (p. 152).

¹⁵⁴ Martine Delvaux, *Histoires de fantômes: spectralité et témoignage dans les récits de femmes contemporains* (Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2005), p. 20.

¹⁵⁵ Alfred J. López, *Posts and Pasts: a Theory of Postcolonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 66.

¹⁵⁶ Gordon, p. 60.

¹⁵⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Ghostwriting’, *Diacritics*, 25.2 (1995), 65-84 (p. 66).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁵⁹ López, p. 36.

O’Riley conceptualizes the postcolonial era as ‘the Freudian *unheimlich* of history’ in which the ghost marks ‘a return of that which has been written out of history’.¹⁶⁰ Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs also argue that the ‘postcolonial ghost story is [...] often quite literally about “the return of the repressed”—namely, the return of the “truth” (or a “truth effect”) about colonization’,¹⁶¹ while Kathleen Brogan ventures that, ‘Through the agency of ghosts, group histories that have in some way been threatened, erased, or fragmented are recuperated and revised’.¹⁶² For Durrant, moreover, ‘To open one’s art to the fully realized presence of a haunting is to practice what one might call a postcolonial ethics’.¹⁶³ In much the same way that melancholia has been posited as a means of fighting on behalf of the socio-political erasure of certain minoritarian identities, then, haunting is also postulated as a means of disavowing the erasure of the subaltern colonized/ethnic other.¹⁶⁴

Several scholars have thus drawn attention to the theoretical interconnections between Freudian psychoanalysis and spectrality. Laurence Rickels has outlined the ancient relationship between haunting and mourning,¹⁶⁵ while Fiona Barclay contends that ‘talk of loss and mourning [is] frequently associated with instances of haunting’.¹⁶⁶ Peter Buse and

¹⁶⁰ O’Riley, ‘Postcolonial Haunting’, n. pag. (para. 2 of 22).

¹⁶¹ Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, ‘The Postcolonial Ghost Story’, in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 179-200 (p. 188).

¹⁶² Kathleen Brogan, *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 5-6.

¹⁶³ Durrant, p. 14. See also Henstra, p. 19.

¹⁶⁴ The quotations cited above demonstrate how proponents of haunting often seek to remember the past by filling in its gaps and silences. At the same time, however, the concept of haunting, especially as it is imagined by Derrida, also acknowledges that certain traces can never be fully articulated or recovered. Theories of haunting frequently exhibit a paradoxical, and perhaps irresolvable, tension between haunting as a recuperative project and haunting as absence. This aporia is also discernible in contemporary theorizations of melancholia—as will be examined later on in this introduction—as well as in trauma theory, in which trauma’s inherent unspeakability is seemingly at odds with the idea of trauma as a process that can be worked through via counselling and the reconstruction of the past. For a discussion of this paradox in trauma theory see Irene Visser, ‘Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 47.3 (2011), 270-82.

¹⁶⁵ Laurence Rickels, *Aberrations of Mourning: Writing on German Crypts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), p. 8.

¹⁶⁶ Barclay, p. xvii.

Andrew Stott venture, moreover, that the ‘trope of spectrality is evident in many of the central metapsychological concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis’.¹⁶⁷ Even if, as Barclay points out, Freud never engaged explicitly with ghosts, his theories nonetheless treat instances of haunting.¹⁶⁸ Freud’s conceptualization of the uncanny or the *unheimlich*, literally the return of something that was once familiar,¹⁶⁹ corresponds to LaCapra’s post-Freudian reading of melancholia as a process in which ‘the past [...] hauntingly returns as the repressed’.¹⁷⁰ The moment of return thus symbolizes a kind of unfinished business in which ‘the figure of the spectre stands for what may not receive adequate symbolization in the work of mourning’.¹⁷¹ Indeed, as Eng and Kazanjian suggest, the incorporated lost object points to an excess that ‘remains’ and which haunts the present.¹⁷² As Janet Carsten puts it, ‘The presence of ghosts and uncanny hauntologies suggests [...] losses that are excessive, or circumstances in which those who bear them are not resigned to giving up their attachments’.¹⁷³ The repetitive return of the ghost—itsself evocative of the melancholic subject’s repeated expulsion and re-appropriation of the lost object—suggests that a particular past or identity cannot, or will not, be exorcized or mourned.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, ‘Introduction: a Future for Haunting’, in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 1-20 (p. 12).

¹⁶⁸ Barclay, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

¹⁶⁹ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, in *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 123-62 (p. 131).

¹⁷⁰ LaCapra, ‘Trauma, Absence, Loss’, p. 716.

¹⁷¹ Best and Robson, p. 5.

¹⁷² Eng and Kazanjian, p. 4. See also Del Villano, p. 86.

¹⁷³ Janet Carsten, ‘Introduction: Ghosts of Memory’, in *Ghosts of Memory: Essays on Remembrance and Relatedness*, ed. by Janet Carsten (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 1-35 (p. 13).

¹⁷⁴ Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, pp. 256-57. For further references to the relationship between haunting and melancholia see Khanna, *Dark Continents*, p. 25. Cheng also suggests that ‘the melancholic ego is a haunted ego [...] [and] the “object” is also ghostly [...] because Freud is finally not that interested in what happens to the object or *its* potential for subjectivity’ (p. 10).

Against a Politics of Melancholia

Strategically deployed as ethico-political forms of remembrance, haunting and melancholia have become so ubiquitous that they now risk operating as theoretical metanarratives. Just like trauma, which has been generalized almost ‘to the point of meaninglessness’, melancholia has similarly been over-exploited, proffering putative solutions to a whole host of different losses.¹⁷⁵ Theories of haunting have also been condemned for adopting a generalizing approach to the past that fails to take account of geographical or cultural specificities,¹⁷⁶ while Martin Jay has commented that the predominance of the uncanny or *unheimlich*—described as yet another ‘master trope’¹⁷⁷ of our era—means that everybody can, in a sense, identify as haunted or homeless.¹⁷⁸ Jay’s observation calls to mind LaCapra’s caveat concerning the conflation of structural absence and historical loss, suggesting that one of the reasons for the overuse of concepts such as *hantologie* and the *unheimlich* is the manner in which different forms of loss are subsumed together. If, as psychoanalyst Earl Hopper suggests, ‘Traumatic experience is ubiquitous’, then each individual is able to identify as a traumatized subject, even if the trauma in question is caused by the rupture with the maternal object or the feeling of exile that arises when confronted with the inherent ‘unhomeliness’ of language itself.¹⁷⁹ Peter Sacks warns against the conflation of historical loss and structural lack, suggesting that the conceptualization of loss as foundational

¹⁷⁵ Wald, p. 3. See also Henstra (p. 17) and Esther Sánchez-Pardo, *Cultures of the Death Drive: Melanie Klein and Modernist Melancholia* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 392. In *History and Memory after Auschwitz* LaCapra similarly argues that ‘the more general problem of trauma has been prominent in recent thought [...] there is a great temptation to trope away from specificity and to generalize hyperbolically, for example, through an extremely abstract mode of discourse [...] [that] elaborate[s] an undifferentiated notion of all history (or at least all modernity) as trauma’ (p. 23).

¹⁷⁶ See O’Riley, ‘Postcolonial Haunting’ (para. 2); Luckhurst, ‘The Contemporary London Gothic’, p. 528.

¹⁷⁷ Martin Jay, *Cultural Semantics: Key Words of Our Time* (London: Athlone, 1998), p. 157.

¹⁷⁸ Martin Jay, ‘Introduction’, in *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*, ed. by Jo Collins and John Jervis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1-9 (pp. 1-2).

¹⁷⁹ Earl Hopper, *Traumatic Experience in the Unconscious Life of Groups* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003), p. 55.

inevitably forecloses a genuine engagement with real historical losses.¹⁸⁰ The aim, then, would be to distinguish between what Hopper terms ‘(t)rauma’ and ‘(T)rauma’, yet the contemporary preoccupation with trauma and loss means that abstract losses—oftentimes absences masquerading as losses—are categorized alongside tangible and historical losses.¹⁸¹ Everyone becomes a victim of something as real events are subsumed within a generalized culture of trauma and loss, thus moving away from the field of ethics altogether.¹⁸² The attentiveness to the local and the particular that inspired the theoretical turn to trauma, haunting, and melancholia in the first place is thus overlooked as they are transposed onto a wide range of different contexts.¹⁸³

As melancholia threatens to emerge as one of the master narratives of our era, it is increasingly figured as a creative and constructive paradigm. As Forter argues, ‘the depathologizing of melancholia risks shading into a *celebration* of it, or risks at least encouraging its collective cultivation’.¹⁸⁴ If, traditionally, melancholia was regarded as a ‘highly romanticized’ state of grief linked to acumen,¹⁸⁵ today it is celebrated as innovative and productive. In the words of Eng and Kazanjian, ‘a better understanding of melancholic attachments to loss might [...] mak[e] visible not only their social bases but also their creative, unpredictable, political aspects’.¹⁸⁶ They also argue that ‘melancholia offers a

¹⁸⁰ Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. xii.

¹⁸¹ Hopper, p. 55.

¹⁸² Forter, p. 19.

¹⁸³ In the introduction to their edited collection *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, for instance, Eng and Kazanjian state that, ‘These essays examine both individual and collective encounters with twentieth-century historical traumas and legacies of, among others, revolution, war, genocide, slavery, decolonization, exile, migration, reunification, globalization, and AIDS’ (p. 2).

¹⁸⁴ Forter, p. 10.

¹⁸⁵ Schiesari, p. 38.

¹⁸⁶ Eng and Kazanjian, p. 3.

capriciousness of meaning’,¹⁸⁷ while Wald claims that melancholia’s attraction stems from its ‘capaciousness’,¹⁸⁸ a term which gestures towards the ‘ability of the melancholic object to express multiple losses at once’.¹⁸⁹ This discursively produced and depathologized form of melancholia has even been invested with a utopianism that, in Forter’s words, ‘makes it, at times, unrecognizable *as* melancholia’.¹⁹⁰ In his discussion of the historical deployment of melancholia from Aristotle to Freud, for instance, Agamben reconceives melancholia as the basis for a newly imagined world:

No longer a phantasm and not yet a sign, the unreal object of melancholy introjection opens a space that is neither the hallucinated oneiric scene of the phantasms nor the indifferent world of natural objects. In this intermediate epiphanic place, located in the no-man’s-land between narcissistic self-love and external object-choice, the creations of human culture will be situated one day.¹⁹¹

While Agamben endows the melancholic object with an almost messianic significance, Eng and Kazanjian posit that:

melancholia’s continued and open relation to the past finally allows us to *gain new perspectives on and new understandings of lost objects*. [...] In this sense, melancholia raises the question of what makes *a world of new objects, places, and ideals* possible. At the same time, what are the psychic mechanisms [...] that make investment in that *new world* imaginable and thinkable?¹⁹²

The fetishistic desire for a new, utopian world is clearly discernible within their discourse, suggesting that the value of the lost object lies merely in its ability to engender the creation of the ‘new’. Furthermore, as we have seen, Khanna argues that melancholia has the potential to generate utopian futures and it is possible to trace within her writing a melancholic reiteration

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁸⁸ Wald, p. 4.

¹⁸⁹ Eng and Kazanjian, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ Forter, p. 9. See also Lynn Enterline, *The Tears of Narcissus: Melancholia and Masculinity in Early Modern Writing* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 15. Enterline argues that ‘Melancholia occurs, on the one hand, as a clinical/medical condition and, on the other hand, as a discursive practice’.

¹⁹¹ Agamben, *Stanzas*, p. 25.

¹⁹² Eng and Kazanjian, p. 4 (my emphasis).

of the utopian desires of the anti-colonial struggles of the fifties and sixties.¹⁹³ Her teleological positioning of past, present, and future as separate entities undermines what melancholic haunting is—however inadequately—attempting to give expression to, that is, the interplay of differing temporalities. Indeed, utopia is concerned with the absolutely new and as Russell Jacoby explains it, ‘*utopian* in its widest [...] meaning’ amounts to ‘a belief that the future could fundamentally *surpass* the present’.¹⁹⁴

This investment in utopia is particularly surprising given that melancholia is imagined as a counterpoint to the idealizing impulses of Freudian mourning. As Tammy Clewell, following Martin Jay, articulates, ‘Freudian mourning [...] echoes one of the utopian goals of the modernist era: the injunction to “make it new”’, a point that explains the turn towards a more ambivalent and ethically charged form of melancholic mourning.¹⁹⁵ By investing in a utopian future, theorists of melancholia thus run the risk of replicating the idealizing norms of Freudian mourning that they endeavour to subvert, while a related danger is that the lost object becomes secondary to the fetishistic desire for the new, thus undermining the ethical foundation behind the turn to melancholia. This is certainly the case where Eng and Kazanjian are concerned, as they contend that, ‘Collectively, the essays in this anthology place less emphasis on *what* is lost’,¹⁹⁶ instead focusing on the affective dimensions that loss generates and its potential for the creation of ‘an infinite number of new objects, places, and ideals’.¹⁹⁷ In *The Gendering of Melancholia*, Schiesari argues that it is precisely this disregard for the object that is at the heart of melancholic object investment:

¹⁹³ ‘Melancholia’, argues Khanna in *Dark Continents*, ‘becomes the basis for an ethico-political understanding of colonial pasts, postcolonial presents, and utopian futures’ (p. 30).

¹⁹⁴ Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. xi.

¹⁹⁵ Clewell, ‘Mourning Beyond Melancholia’, p. 58.

¹⁹⁶ Eng and Kazanjian, p. 6.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Like the fetish, the affect of melancholia both affirms and denies loss, insisting on there being a loss while denying the loss of the “what” in the object. In other words, loss itself becomes the dominating feature when the “content” of loss has been emptied (repressed).¹⁹⁸

Building upon Freud’s contention in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ that the subject may not know precisely what has been lost in a person,¹⁹⁹ Schiesari argues that ‘the reason the loss in the melancholic is not clear (is opaque from consciousness) is that it is the condition of loss *as* loss that is privileged and not the loss of any particular object’.²⁰⁰ More recently Cheng has reiterated this argument to suggest that:

What Freud does not address in this essay but what must be a consequence of this psychical drama is the multiple layers of denial and exclusion that the melancholic must exercise in order to maintain this elaborate structure of loss-but-not-loss. First, the melancholic must deny loss as loss in order to sustain the fiction of possession. Second, the melancholic would have to make sure that the “object” never returns.²⁰¹

For Cheng, then, ‘At the heart of loss there is now an active exclusion and denial of the object’.²⁰² Far from figuring as an other-oriented mnemonic structure, melancholia is regarded as a self-serving mechanism in which the incorporation of the lost object—whose singularity has been effaced—enables the subject to possess its other.

Even if it is possible to challenge this argument by suggesting, as does Freud, that the melancholic identifies with the object insofar as it symbolizes the subject’s ego-ideal, this still problematizes the ethics of melancholia.²⁰³ In ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ Freud insists that melancholia arises because the lost other existed as a narcissistically-loved object for the grieving subject.²⁰⁴ Thus, as Fatima Naqvi explains, ‘melancholia, as opposed to mourning, comes into being [...] when [the object’s] difference from the “I” has been denied in favor of

¹⁹⁸ Schiesari, p. 47.

¹⁹⁹ Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, p. 245.

²⁰⁰ Schiesari, p. 43.

²⁰¹ Cheng, p. 9.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁰³ Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, p. 249.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

an imagined similarity'.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, argues Eric Santner, the loss of the narcissistically loved object threatens to incite a concomitant loss of ego because 'the object was loved not as separate and distinct from oneself, but rather as a mirror of one's own sense of self and power'.²⁰⁶ As the loss of the object jeopardizes the ego, the subject is compelled to incorporate the object in a desperate bid to maintain itself. Viewed from this angle, melancholia appears as a self-referential mode of grief in which the alterity of the object is suppressed in favour of a mimetic reflection of the self in the other; in other words, the object is preserved only insofar as it can sustain the self.²⁰⁷

This melancholic model of incorporation is described by Freud as a form of cannibalism, a metaphor that speaks to the ambivalence and rage that underpin melancholia.²⁰⁸ The relationship between subject and object, Freud stresses, is complex and predicated on a prior ambivalence, which sometimes arises out of 'traumatic experiences in connection with the object'.²⁰⁹ Thus rather than operating as a psychic safeguard, the melancholic ego is involved in 'countless separate struggles [...] over the object, in which hate and love contend with each other; the one seeks to detach the libido from the object, the other to maintain this position of the libido against the assault'.²¹⁰ The ego thus repeatedly incorporates and repulses the object in a cyclical and debilitating cycle of dis/appropriation.

²⁰⁵ Fatima Naqvi, *The Literary and Cultural Rhetoric of Victimhood: Western Europe 1970-2005* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), p. 105.

²⁰⁶ Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 2.

²⁰⁷ See Mari Ruti, 'From Melancholia to Meaning: How to Live the Past in the Present', *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 15.5 (2005), 637-60 (p. 644). In a footnote Ruti argues that 'Once the incorporation has been completed, the object no longer exists as a separate entity and thus loses its power to induce change. [...] melancholia is always a self-serving psychic state because the transformation of the ego that takes place in melancholia can only be accomplished through the destruction of the object'.

²⁰⁸ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 249; See also Azzedine Haddour, *Colonial Myths: History and Narrative* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 189.

²⁰⁹ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 256-57.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

Freud suggests, moreover, that this conflict of ambivalence can lead to the symbolic death of the object:

Just as mourning impels the ego to give up the object by declaring the object to be dead and offering the ego the inducement of continuing to live, so does each single struggle of ambivalence loosen the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating it and even as it were killing it.²¹¹

Thus in returning to Freud's original 1917 binarism in order to suggest that melancholia preserves the lost object at all costs, theorists are deliberately overlooking the melancholic's propensity to kill the object. Indeed, as both Freud and Julia Kristeva explain, the ambivalent relationship between subject and object can culminate in suicide as the subject, having identified as the object, kills itself.²¹² The subject's ostensible self-abasement is thus nothing more than a mask for the anger and aggression that the subject harbours in relation to the object.²¹³ Yet as Forter makes clear, the recent depathologization of melancholia ignores the bleak, isolating and, at times, aggressive inner world of the melancholic.²¹⁴

This ambivalent incorporation of the lost object can be read as a desperate attempt to thwart change and to maintain the status quo. The 'recursive looping of melancholia' sustains loss-as-loss in an attempt to preserve the subject, thus operating as an elaborate defence mechanism that denies reality and prevents the subject from establishing new social attachments.²¹⁵ Yet more than that, the repetition at the heart of melancholia embroils the subject in a perpetual state of victimhood. Indeed, despite Freud's claim that melancholia, like mourning, eventually comes to an end, proponents of melancholia nonetheless celebrate the melancholic's refusal to 'let go' and transcend loss.²¹⁶ Disturbingly, however, this

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 257.

²¹² Ibid., p. 252; Julia Kristeva, *Soleil noir: dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 20.

²¹³ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 248.

²¹⁴ Forter, p. 8.

²¹⁵ Naqvi, p. 108.

²¹⁶ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 252

preservation of the melancholic condition is inexorably linked to the perpetuation of the victim subject-position on which it hinges. ‘Psychoanalytical accounts, in particular, are dependent on a victim scenario’, writes Naqvi, an assertion that is particularly true of melancholia.²¹⁷ The melancholic subject—to say nothing of the ghostly lost object—must act out the past, reliving loss and trauma as fragmented instants that cannot be fully understood.²¹⁸

What is more, since an ethics of memory is frequently dependent upon the subject’s refusal to either give up its objects or work towards a process of healing, the subject is implicitly encouraged to maintain the traumatic condition. Certain symptoms—repetitive looping, silence, and flashbacks—are, despite their debilitating effects, valorized as ethical markers of remembrance since the alternative, namely mourning, is associated with forgetting. Roger Luckhurst, in his book *The Trauma Question*, situates this fetishization of trauma ‘entirely under the sign of post-traumatic melancholia’, arguing that there is now ‘a kind of injunction to maintain the post-traumatic condition. To be in a frozen or suspended afterwards, it seems to be assumed, is the only proper ethical response to trauma’.²¹⁹ Caught in a putative aporia between mourning and melancholia, theorists frequently valorize the traumatic condition as a form of remembrance, no matter how impartial and inaccessible that memory might be. Yet if an ethics of memory is dependent upon the perpetuation of the traumatic condition, it is difficult to imagine how the melancholic subject might transcend the victim subject-position. If a politicized ethics of memory is predicated on melancholia and

²¹⁷ Naqvi, p. 8.

²¹⁸ LaCapra, ‘Trauma, Absence, Loss’, p. 699.

²¹⁹ Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 10. (Quoted in Visser, p. 274). See also Ramadanovic, who argues that, ‘trauma studies, based on the assumption of the possibility of the transmission, repetition of trauma, may function as a strategy of prolonging compulsion repetition and of guaranteeing *jouissance* in disaster, and thus, of obscuring a foreclosure’ (p. 117). O’Riley, in ‘Postcolonial Haunting’, also contends that ‘Haunting is pervasive in postcolonial thought precisely because of its affective dimension’ (para. 2).

victimhood, how and when might melancholia mutate into political agency? The paradox of melancholia, then, lies in the fact that its victims must remain ensnared in a cycle of victimhood for agency to be imagined as attainable.

Reflecting what Luckhurst describes as the ‘flat contradiction’ inherent to trauma theory, whereby the traumatic condition is linked to both language and disavowal, melancholia is also paradoxically associated with silence and speech.²²⁰ If, for Brophy, the melancholic subject operates as a ventriloquist through whom the dead can mediate,²²¹ Derrida’s *Spectres de Marx* has, as we have seen, also encouraged people to engage in conversation with the ghostly lost object.²²² Despite this, however, melancholia is typically regarded as a barrier to speech, inhibiting the linguistic process of introjection commonly linked to mourning.²²³ In *L’Écorce et le noyau* Abraham and Torok thus stress that the fantasy of incorporation inhibits language, arguing that instead of articulating loss, the melancholic subject introduces ‘une chose imaginaire’—the object—within the psyche in order to fill the void.²²⁴ The ghostly object, they suggest, becomes entombed within a psychic crypt erected within the subject, indicating that the loss cannot be named as such.²²⁵ For Abraham and Torok, ‘l’impossibilité de l’introjection va jusqu’à interdire de faire un langage de son refus du deuil’,²²⁶ pointing to ‘un deuil *inavouable*’.²²⁷ Building upon Freudian metapsychology, they develop this further to elaborate the concept of the transgenerational phantom which hauntingly passes from the unconscious of the parent to the child. The phantom symbolizes

²²⁰ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 82. (Quoted in Visser, p. 274).

²²¹ Brophy, p. 8.

²²² Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, p. 15.

²²³ Julia Kristeva, *Soleil noir*, p. 13; See also Michelle Beauclair, *Albert Camus, Marguerite Duras, and the Legacy of Mourning* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 7.

²²⁴ Abraham and Torok, p. 264.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

the transmission of a familial secret across the generations and thus, unlike the Freudian return of the repressed, it is the past of another which returns to haunt the subject. What is more, the subject is not haunted by the ghostly object per se, but by the phantom's unmentionable secret: transgenerational haunting involves 'l'enterrement *dans l'objet* d'un fait inavouable'.²²⁸ Notably, the secret cannot be grasped because the phantom is said to release a series of 'mots "fantomogènes"' that, via a process of demetaphorization, render language opaque and ungraspable.²²⁹ For Abraham and Torok, then, both the crypt and the transgenerational phantom effectively perpetuate the status quo, giving credence to Ruti's assertion that:²³⁰

as long as there exists no narrative with which to transform the silences of melancholia into communicable meaning, it remains impossible to activate the creative potentialities that melancholia may contain.²³¹

Melancholia's ostensible capacity to generate change is thus for nought if the melancholic is to remain entombed within its silences.

As Abraham and Torok's theory of the phantom indicates, then, the very notion of melancholic memory is a misnomer. As Forter rightly indicates in his discussion of modernist literature, 'melancholia [...] encourages less a remedial remembering than a politics of memorial obfuscation'.²³² Returning to Freud's 1917 essay, he persuasively argues that 'Contemporary theorists can embrace melancholia only inasmuch as they "forget" that it entails an *unconscious distortion* of the lost object's meaning—i.e., it's a species of forgetting, not remembering'.²³³ Indeed, in 'Mourning and Melancholia' Freud immediately establishes a distinction between melancholia, in which 'an object-loss' is 'withdrawn from

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 427.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 432.

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 260.

²³¹ Ruti, p. 647.

²³² Forter, p. 11.

²³³ Ibid., p. 10.

consciousness', and mourning, 'in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious'.²³⁴ What is more, during the work of mourning, he writes, 'Each single one of the memories [...] is brought up and hyper-catheted', whereas in melancholia, the subject 'cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost'.²³⁵ Ramadanovic elaborates on this by returning to Freud's analysis, in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', of his grandson's repetitive game in which he repeatedly repulses and retrieves his bobbin in a *fort/da* motion that Freud interprets as a form of acting out the loss of his mother. For Ramadanovic, 'Freud's grandson is merely repeating, not remembering, her absence, since he is unaware that the cause of his game is his mother's absence'.²³⁶

This unconscious element, arguably the most fundamental aspect of melancholia, has been stressed by several theorists throughout the twentieth century. Contextualizing Freudian metapsychology within the framework of postwar Germany's inability to mourn, for instance, the psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich figure melancholia as an unconscious process of denial.²³⁷ More recently, Paul Gilroy has built on the Mitscherlichs' thesis, figuring Britain's postimperial melancholia as a form of repression that speaks to its inability to face up to the loss of its empire.²³⁸ Despite the fact that Freud considers the unconsciousness of melancholia to be one of its primary elements, however, contemporary theories of melancholia repeatedly overlook or downplay its imbrication in the unconscious distortion of the past.²³⁹ This oversight is all the more disconcerting given the fact that many

²³⁴ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 245.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

²³⁶ Ramadanovic, p. 106.

²³⁷ Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, trans. by Beverley R. Placzek (New York: Grove Press, 1975), p. 15.

²³⁸ Gilroy, p. 99.

²³⁹ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 245.

theorists continue to base their theorization of a depathologized form of melancholia on Freud's original 1917 binary.

Even if we take account of Freud's later revision of grief in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), melancholia is still figured as an unconscious response to object loss. In this essay Freud postulates that the processes of melancholic incorporation and identification are in fact normative mechanisms by which the ego deals with object loss. Essentially depathologizing melancholia, Freud suggests that identification is a 'normal' and 'common' process that 'makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called [the ego's] "character"'.²⁴⁰ He later develops this, contending:

It may be that this identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects. At any rate the process, especially in the early phases of development, is a very frequent one, and it makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object choices.²⁴¹

In his revised explanation of how melancholic identification operates, Freud gives the example of the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. In his discussion of primary object identification and its relationship to sex/gender, Freud contends that the so-called 'normal',²⁴² that is, heterosexual outcome for a male child is achieved via his identification with the father; likewise, a girl's 'identification with her mother [...] will fix the child's feminine character'.²⁴³ Having confirmed the prevalence of infantile bisexuality, Freud then goes on to identify the role of the super-ego or ego-ideal in the construction of these 'sexual dispositions'.²⁴⁴ The super-ego, as Freud views it, operates as both a command—'You ought

²⁴⁰ Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, p. 23.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

to be like this (like your father)’—and as a prohibition, ultimately inciting the male child to identify with his father.²⁴⁵

More recently, Judith Butler has reinterpreted Freud’s reading of gender/sex identification in *The Ego and the Id* to demonstrate how same-sex love is ‘not just prohibited but foreclosed’.²⁴⁶ Building upon Freud’s conviction that all identification is at heart melancholic and preceded by the loss of an object, Butler argues that conventional (heterosexual) sexuality, in which the child identifies with the same-sex parent, is predicated on the prior loss of that self-same object: ‘the melancholic answer to the loss of the same-sexed object is to incorporate and, indeed, *to become* that object through the construction of the ego ideal’.²⁴⁷ Yet, as Butler ventures, it is not merely that the loss of the same-sex object is then rendered unconscious to the heterosexual ego, but that the individual renounces even ‘the *possibility* of homosexual attachment’,²⁴⁸ a formulation which is perhaps best expressed by her conception of ‘the loss of loss’, in which even the absence that occurs in the wake of a loss is not available to consciousness.²⁴⁹ For Butler, building upon Freud’s theorization of primal identification, the performativity of gender is predicated on the loss of the same-sex object:

The straight man *becomes* (mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of) the man he “never” loved and “never” grieved; the straight woman *becomes* the woman she “never” loved and “never” grieved. It is in this sense, then, that what is most apparently performed as gender is the sign and symptom of a pervasive disavowal.²⁵⁰

Foreclosed within the psyche, the same-sex object is then exteriorized on the subject’s body as the external marker of normative gender and/or sexuality as the subject identifies with the

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁴⁶ Vikki Bell, ‘On Speech, Race and Melancholia: an Interview with Judith Butler’, *Theory, Culture, Society*, 16.2 (1999), 163-74 (p. 170).

²⁴⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), p. 81.

²⁴⁸ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 137 (my emphasis).

²⁴⁹ Butler, ‘Afterword’, p. 467.

²⁵⁰ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 147.

lost and incorporated object. In order for heterosexuality to operate as a normative paradigm, then, the subject must effectively forget not merely the same-sex object but the very possibility of homosexual love.

Butler's theorization of melancholy gender and heterosexuality has important implications for the recent revaluation of melancholia as a political force. If, following Freud, melancholic object-loss forms the core of heterosexuality, it thus stands that melancholia becomes a normalizing and foundational process. This has also been emphasized by Eng who, in his rehabilitation of melancholia as a productive ethico-political framework, argues that 'it must be thought of as entirely *normative*—as a constitutive psychic mechanism engendering subjectivity itself'.²⁵¹ What arises, then, is a curious and seemingly irreconcilable tension between melancholia as 'nascent political protest',²⁵² that is, as a radical and transformative mnemonic model that seeks to counter conservative paradigms, and melancholia as a foundational and even banal mechanism that underpins what Butler refers to as the 'heterosexual mundane'.²⁵³ As Eng and Han, following Adam Phillips, argue, 'If a system of gender melancholy instantiates compulsory male heterosexuality, we nevertheless do not typically describe the normative male subject as melancholic or depressed'.²⁵⁴ The heterosexual subject remains wholly unaware that any loss has occurred, making it difficult to imagine how the structures of melancholia might lead to the politicized remembrance of minoritarian identities; indeed, the conscious recognition of loss must surely form the basis of any mode of transformative politics that seeks to circumvent socio-political erasure and procure agency.

²⁵¹ Eng, p. 1277 (my emphasis).

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 1280.

²⁵³ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), p. 237.

²⁵⁴ Eng and Han, p. 362.

As a normative mechanism, moreover, melancholia also perpetuates and endorses society's sexual norms, enacting the very censorship and forgetting that conservative political groups would propagate. Rather than celebrating melancholia as a mechanism for fighting on behalf of certain minoritarian subject positions, then, it is clearly germane to look to the ways in which 'melancholia [figures] as part of the operation of regulatory power'.²⁵⁵ The process of melancholic identification leads to the construction of what Freud terms a critical or 'special agency', or the super-ego or ego-ideal, a psychic mechanism which condemns the ego for what it perceives to be its failures and shortcomings.²⁵⁶ Butler interprets this critical agency as a kind of societal prohibition that rallies against homosexuality: 'The ego-ideal [...] is precisely the ideal of social rectitude defined over and against homosexuality'.²⁵⁷ In an interview she defines this form of censorship as a 'culturally instituted form[s] of melancholia' in which 'cultural norms [...] dictate in part what will and will not be a loveable object'.²⁵⁸ The self-abasement and suicidal tendencies typically associated with melancholia, and described as prevalent throughout the gay community, can thus be read as the consequence of society's prohibition against homosexual love.²⁵⁹

Amidst the recent proliferation of theories that figure melancholia as a potentially radical and transformative ethico-political framework, then, Butler's analysis figures as a sobering and timely caveat, warning us of melancholia's more insidious and covert mechanisms. As Forter accurately puts it, '[Butler's] analysis obliges us to consider [...] the

²⁵⁵ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 143.

²⁵⁶ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 249.

²⁵⁷ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 141.

²⁵⁸ Bell, p. 170.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 172; Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 14; Crimp, p. 145.

conservative uses to which melancholia is currently put'.²⁶⁰ In view of homosexual attachment, melancholia operates as a conformist model, perpetuating the hegemonic status quo and obscuring or disavowing the very minoritarian identities that theorists of melancholia would have it recover and defend. In many ways, then, melancholia can be said to enact the self-same normalizing impulses of Freudian mourning that generated the turn to an ethico-politics of melancholia in the first place.

Butler's theorization of Freudian melancholia suggests, then, that the simple reversal of the Freudian model of grief is not enough to counter the conservatism associated with mourning. Indeed, both mourning and melancholia are perhaps more similar in structure than certain critics would like to admit: even in his 1917 essay Freud gestured towards the similarities between the two processes,²⁶¹ and certainly his revision of grief in *The Ego and the Id* reconfigures melancholia as a fundamental component of mourning.²⁶² In many ways, then, mourning and melancholia are supplements of each other, suggesting that any reversal of the putative binary between them will not necessarily lead to the radical transformations that are envisioned.

From 'Working Through' to 'Working Upon'

For theorists seeking to move beyond the limitations of the mourning-melancholia binary, the term 'working through' has become increasingly expedient. For Rosello, in a recent analysis of mourning practices as they relate to France and its former colonies, 'What matters today [...] is the past, its impact on the present, but also, and much more importantly, what Theodor

²⁶⁰ Forter, p. 24. For another analysis of the conservative role of melancholia in feminist politics, see Srila Roy, 'Melancholic Politics and the Politics of Melancholia: The Indian Women's Movement', *Feminist Theory*, 10.3 (2009), 341-57.

²⁶¹ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 252.

²⁶² Clewell, 'Mourning Beyond Melancholia', p. 61.

Adorno called ‘the meaning of working through the past’.²⁶³ She establishes this as a ‘new issue,’ asking rhetorically, ‘how then, do we, I, deal with this “working through”?’²⁶⁴ In a similar vein, LaCapra has also insisted upon the timeliness of working through, stating that, ‘one task of future thought would be the exploration of the possibilities and limits of the concept of working-through, notably including its relation to critique, narrative, and normativity’.²⁶⁵ Like Adorno, both critics shift the concept beyond the strictly personal realm of psychotherapy to the macrocosm of historiography, with LaCapra in particular advocating its importance to larger ‘ethical and political considerations’.²⁶⁶

While affirming the importance of working through for socio-historical configurations, LaCapra and Rosello nonetheless attest to its indistinct nature. Several decades ago psychoanalysts spoke of the ‘blurring of the concept of working through’, an ambiguity which ostensibly persists to this day.²⁶⁷ Michael Beintker, for instance, refers to working through as an ‘ambiguous phrase’,²⁶⁸ a critique which is echoed by Rosello who contends that ““working through” is potentially ambiguous’.²⁶⁹ LaCapra similarly postulates, ‘I have insisted on the importance of working-through because of my belief that it has been underemphasized and relatively undeveloped in post-Freudian psychoanalysis. Even in Freud it did not receive much theoretical elaboration’.²⁷⁰ Likewise, Paul Gilroy, in a lecture entitled ‘England’s Post-Imperial Melancholia’ presented at the Oxford Radical Forum (2010),

²⁶³ Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 17.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁶⁵ LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, p. 205.

²⁶⁶ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 210; Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 17. See also Michael Beintker, ‘Remembering Guilt as a Social Project: Some Reflections on the Challenge of Working Through the Past’, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 24.2 (2011), 210-31 (p. 214).

²⁶⁷ J. Sander, C. Dare, and A. Holder, ‘Basic Psychoanalytical Concepts: IX. Working Through’, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 117 (1970), 617-21 (p. 619).

²⁶⁸ Beintker, p. 214.

²⁶⁹ Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 17.

²⁷⁰ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 206. See also René Roussillon, ‘Working Through and its Various Models’, *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 91 (2010), 1405-17 (p. 1405).

articulated the need to ‘work through’ the colonial past while also confirming that the concept lacked theoretical elaboration. One of the reasons for the term’s lack of clarity thus stems from the absence of any sustained critical attention afforded the concept over the years, an ambiguity that accounts, perhaps, for historian Charles Maier’s use of parentheses for the term in his analysis of postwar Germany.²⁷¹

While the concept of working through is today seemingly open to multiple and contingent socio-political interpretations, it is sometimes taken to be synonymous with forgetting or ‘getting over’ the past in order to begin anew. It becomes tantamount to Freudian mourning and open to the self-same critical reproach. Maier’s employment of parentheses must also, therefore, be interpreted as an act of resistance against the singular reduction of the term by those who would engage it as a means of evading accountability for past events. Theodor Adorno, in his essay ‘The Meaning of Working Through the Past’, famously outlines how the term was appropriated by those seeking to elude justice in postwar Germany:

It follows from a formulation, a modish slogan that has become highly suspect during the last years. In this usage “working through the past” does not mean seriously working upon the past, that is, through a lucid consciousness breaking its power to fascinate. On the contrary, its intention is to close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory.²⁷²

In his analysis of the ideology of National Socialism, Adorno indicates that working through was deployed as a normative refrain that absolved individuals from addressing their involvement in Nazism, thus thwarting an engagement with the repressed feelings of guilt and melancholy outlined by the Mitscherlichs in *The Inability to Mourn*.²⁷³ As Beintker puts it, the ‘exalted expression “working through the past” amounted to an *overcoming* of the past. This

²⁷¹ Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 1, 160, 167.

²⁷² Theodor Adorno, ‘The Meaning of Working Through the Past’, in *Can One Live after Auschwitz?: a Philosophical Reader*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and trans. by Rodney Livingstone and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 3-18 (p. 3).

²⁷³ Mitscherlich, p. 23.

sort of speech still exists to this day, even in critical retrospection of the GDR's past undertaken since 1989'.²⁷⁴ Working through has been—and continues to be—conceived by some as an endpoint and a redemptive formula that circumvents ethico-political issues of justice and liability.

According to Adorno, the term should instead mark a process of 'working upon', that is, a process of addressing the past in order to 'break free' of its ability to ensnare the individual or group in an unconscious process of repetition.²⁷⁵ It is important to note, then, that Adorno is not calling for a liberation from the past per se, but for a conscious recognition of the reasons behind certain historical events, in this case the rise of National Socialism. Working through would unearth the relics of Nazi ideology, he contends, and thus go some way to avoiding the melancholic re-emergence of fascist elements in the future: 'National Socialism lives on, and even today we still do not know whether it is merely the ghost of what was so monstrous that lingers on after its own death, or whether it has not yet died at all'.²⁷⁶ Although Adorno was writing in the aftermath of World War II, there have since been several instances of neo-Nazism in Germany.²⁷⁷ The spectres of Nazism thus continue to haunt the German nation, but they do so unconsciously, ready to return uncannily to the present at any given moment.

Adorno's engagement with 'social-psychology' is,²⁷⁸ of course, indebted to Freudian psychoanalysis and, more specifically, to Freud's juxtaposition of working through with acting

²⁷⁴ Beintker, p. 214.

²⁷⁵ Adorno, p. 3.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁷⁷ See Lee McGowan, 'Much More Than a Phantom Menace! Assessing the Character, Level and Threat of Neo-Nazi Violence in Germany, 1977-2003', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 14.2 (2006), 255-72.

²⁷⁸ Adorno, p. 11.

out in his essay ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through’ (1914).²⁷⁹ In this paper he figures working through as an individuated form of transference that occurs during psychotherapy, positing it as the antithesis of the repetition compulsion. If a traumatic memory is repressed, suggests Freud, it is then predisposed to repetition and acting out:

If we confine ourselves to this second type in order to bring out the difference, we may say that the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it.²⁸⁰

In contrast to this unconscious repetition of the past, Freud posits working through as a mode of remembrance:

This working-through of the resistances may in practice turn out to be an arduous task for the subject of the analysis and a trial of patience for the analyst. Nevertheless it is a part of the work which effects the greatest changes in the patient and which distinguishes analytic treatment from any kind of treatment by suggestion. From a theoretical point of view one may correlate it with the “abreacting” of the quotas of affect strangled by repression.²⁸¹

Working through is perceived as an act of transference that elicits repressed memories, symbolically rendering the past in a manner that enables it to be understood by both analyst and analysand.

Working through is frequently imagined in opposition to acting out, and while the former is sometimes associated with mourning, acting out is often equated with melancholia or, at the very least, seen as one of its primary components. In a discussion of Claude Lanzmann’s film *Shoah*, for instance, LaCapra suggests that, ‘Working-through, of which mourning is one prominent form [...] should be seen as a supplement and counterforce to melancholia and acting out’.²⁸² This dialectic is also maintained to some extent by Rosello,

²⁷⁹ Sigmund Freud, ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working Through’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 12 (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), pp. 145-57.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-56.

²⁸² Dominick LaCapra, ‘Lanzmann’s Shoah: “Here there is no why”’, *Critical Inquiry*, 23 (1997), 231–69 (p. 269). See also E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, ‘Introduction: from Traumatic Paralysis to the Force Field of

who frames her discussion of postcolonial France through the terms ‘repentance’ and ‘reparative’, whereby ‘repentance’ connotes a melancholic fixation upon the past that is insurmountable and interminable, and ‘reparative’ points to a means of engaging with the past in a conscious and self-critical manner.²⁸³

The danger of conceiving working through in binary opposition to acting out is, of course, that any theoretical elaboration of the concept remains ensnared within a duality that echoes that of mourning and melancholia. Both LaCapra and Rosello are attentive to this critical impasse and while they cannot, at times, avoid expounding a critical discourse in which working through and acting out are conceived antagonistically, they nonetheless emphasise that the two concepts are not diametrically opposed.²⁸⁴ Acting out will not transmute seamlessly into working through and in some cases, where traumatic ‘memories’ are particularly acute, acting out may form part of working through.²⁸⁵ Rosello similarly asserts that the ‘reparative is not the opposite of repentance’,²⁸⁶ and wonders whether it is:

possible to both, on the one hand, renounce denial, forgetfulness and amnesia and, on the other hand, to give up on the illusion that once we have looked the past in the face, once we have “worked through” it, our present will be free from its traumatic legacy?²⁸⁷

This dilemma is also addressed by LaCapra, who critiques the tendency to limit theoretical analysis ‘to two extremes—total mastery and the shattering effect of an endless repetition compulsion—extremes that attest to the predominance of an all-or-nothing logic’.²⁸⁸

Modernity’, in *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), pp. 1-22 (pp. 5-6).

²⁸³ Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 5; See also p. 20.

²⁸⁴ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 206; Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 23.

²⁸⁵ LaCapra, ‘Trauma, Absence, Loss’, pp. 716-17.

²⁸⁶ Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 6.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁸⁸ LaCapra, ‘Trauma, Absence, Loss’, p. 718.

Paraphrasing Adorno, Rosello underscores the need for a new mode of memorialization that acknowledges the past and its losses all the while attending to the needs of the present:

The goal perhaps is to invent or perhaps to recognize and celebrate, where it exists, a new type of “breaking free”. It does not have to be a breaking free “from” the past but a recognition that living with the ever-present past is unavoidable, that, therefore, the present is this so-called past of violence and guilt, but also that a welcoming of that heritage does not mean that we must reproduce it.²⁸⁹

Rosello acknowledges the prevalence of the working through/acting out binary and the importance of Freudian working through in circumventing repression, while pointing to the possibility of an emergent model that is not limited to established conceptions of mourning or melancholia, but develops out of a relation to the two. LaCapra imagines this new mode of relating to the past as:

a third sense of theory related to Freud’s notion of working-through. Theory in this sense would prompt an attempt to combine criticism and self-criticism with a practice of articulation that would resist redemptive totalization. It would not deny the irreducibility of loss or the role of paradox and aporia. But instead of becoming compulsively fixated on or symptomatically reinforcing impasses, it would engage a process of mourning that would attempt, however self-questioningly and haltingly, to specify its haunting objects and (even if only symbolically) to give them a “proper” burial.²⁹⁰

LaCapra endeavours to deconstruct the binary between working through and acting out, while acknowledging that certain traces of mourning or melancholia may be a factor in new forms of working through. On the one hand, like Rosello, he realistically accepts that, even if it were desired, loss could never be fully relinquished, just as the past is never fully past but forms part of the present.²⁹¹ At the same time, however, he suggests that working through may help the individual to consign traumatic events to a specific temporal space in which they are remembered but not acted out as if they were recurring within the present. Carolina Garland

²⁸⁹ Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 19.

²⁹⁰ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 193.

²⁹¹ Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 24.

similarly conceives that psychological ‘recovery’ does not equate to ‘achieving a pre-trauma condition once more, but achieving a state of mind in which the event is not felt to be the only or the most significant experience in that individual’s life as a whole’.²⁹²

Furthermore, working through is conceived as an interminable process that involves the past and its continuing relation to the present. Addressing Adorno’s fear that working through operates as a justification for ‘moving on’, LaCapra thus stresses that, ‘Working through the past [...] [is] a process (not an accomplished state)’.²⁹³ Beintker echoes this, arguing that, ‘Working through is not working *away from* the past, but rather a conscious and intentional remembering which resists turning into a commemorative routine, a ritual which entails no further obligation’.²⁹⁴ Working through is viewed as a constant and deliberate process of (re)negotiation that establishes interconnections between events and referents without transforming them into a totalizing or linear narrative.²⁹⁵

Nevertheless, despite these caveats, the term ‘working through’ connotes a process of transcendence that belies an on-going attentiveness to the past; what is more, it is too frequently associated with its putative opposite, acting out. Instead, I would venture, it is more fruitful to return to Adorno’s use of the term ‘working upon’, which cannot be misconstrued as a desire to surmount the many losses of the past. Processes of working upon would endeavour to establish—and indeed question—the relationship between the past and the present in a conscious manner. Rather than monumentalizing the past or preserving it as a melancholic relic, they would continuously engage history, enabling a forward-moving and transformative process that would welcome the past as a formative part of the present. Most

²⁹² Carolina Garland, ‘Trauma and the Possibility of Recovery’, in *Introducing Psychoanalysis: Essential Themes and Topics*, ed. by Susan Budd and Richard Rusbridger (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 246-61 (p. 246).

²⁹³ LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, p. 40.

²⁹⁴ Beintker, p. 215.

²⁹⁵ LaCapra, ‘Trauma, Absence, Loss’, p. 705.

importantly, perhaps, working upon would not focus on the past and the lost other at the detriment of the present or the subject. While, in view of the ethical imperative to attend to the other, this might initially seem injudicious, I would argue that such an injunction has encouraged counter-memorial forms that, like melancholia, hinder, rather than encourage, an ethical relationship between self and other. If, as Bennington suggests, much discourse on the other really belies a vested self-interest, this is perhaps because the relationship between self and other cannot be so easily reduced to two separate entities.²⁹⁶ Thus rather than insisting upon the ethical subject's ability to preserve the other as other—surely itself a form of mastery—it is perhaps time that we took a closer look at the entanglement between self and other that arises, in inconceivable ways, in the wake of loss.

In recent years Judith Butler has begun to theorize modes of grief that might transcend the Freudian binary of mourning and melancholia. Like LaCapra and Rosello, Butler is equally concerned with communal and historical modes of memorialization, but her project begins with a return to more private and individuated instances of loss. In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) Butler probes the problematic—and potentiality—of writing the self, while in *Precarious Life* (2004) she addresses how grief can be harnessed in the theorization of an ethical relationality between self and other. Critical of both mourning and melancholia, Butler seeks a new model of grief that would be based on the vulnerability of self and other and hence on the precariousness of life itself. Notably, then, any responsibility for the other must begin with a return to the self, and with the realization that death renders the subject vulnerable in ways that cannot be envisaged prior to loss; in other words, an ethics of grief begins with a renunciation of melancholia. If mourning replaces the lost object and melancholia entails its preservation, the ethical kind of grief imagined by Butler would

²⁹⁶ Bennington, *Not Half No End*, p. 39.

embrace change as a necessary component in the reassessment of the relationship between self and other:

Perhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance. There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss, and this latter cannot be charted or planned.²⁹⁷

Rather than celebrating a melancholic militancy in which the past remains interminably frozen in time, Butler asks instead that we consciously accede to loss and the various changes it might engender. Such an acceptance of loss demands courage since the consequences for the self are necessarily contingent and unforeseeable.

Returning to Freud's claim in 'Mourning and Melancholia' that one may know who has been lost but not what it is about the person that has been lost, Butler argues that it is precisely this 'unknowingness' that destabilizes the self and incites a discursive, transformative process.²⁹⁸ Indeed, for Butler, the other cannot be conceived as an entirely separate entity, but as a being that is tied to the subject, partially constituting the self in ways that cannot be verbalized. If that other is lost, then the subject is compelled to undergo a radical process of self-analysis as s/he attempts to understand what it is about the other—and hence the self—that has been lost and/or modified in the wake of loss:

It is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. What "am" I, without you? [...] On one level, I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what I have lost "in" you, that for which I have no vocabulary, is the relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as *the tie* by which those terms are differentiated.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 21.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

The opacity of the self following the death of an other stems from a repudiation of melancholic object-relations and the subject's realization that the radical alterity of the other lies beyond the bounds of knowledge or containment. Indeed, just as the melancholic will not succeed in fully possessing the other, despite his relentless attempts to do so, the Butlerian subject cannot know or contain the ethereal, intractable element of the other that is imagined to have constituted that person. Rather than incorporate the other in a bid to preserve the self, Butler imagines the self as accepting loss and hence accepting the irrevocable changes wrought by that loss. In grief, then, the subject becomes consciously and painfully opaque to itself in ways that were not, perhaps, evident whilst the other was alive.

For Butler, the 'unknowingness' that constitutes grief, and which is necessarily constitutive of all self-other relationships, becomes apparent when the subject attempts to give an account of herself. If, as Peter Brooks contends in *Troubling Confessions*, the confessional discourse of psychoanalysis is informed by the desire 'to know oneself and to make oneself known', and is thus geared 'toward the discovery of the most hidden truths about selfhood', Butler instead argues that, owing to the relationality between self and other, the self can never be known.³⁰⁰

I might try to tell a story here about what I am feeling, but it would have to be a story in which the very "I" who seeks to tell the story is stopped in the midst of telling; the very "I" is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing. [...]. My narrative falters, as it must.³⁰¹

This linguistic undoing, an effect of the psychological destabilization of the self at stake in grief, lies somewhere in-between mourning and melancholia, since it neither forecloses the articulation of loss nor succeeds in rendering the lost object (and hence the self) in words. It

³⁰⁰ Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 9.

³⁰¹ Butler, *Prekarious Life*, p. 23.

thus resists grandiloquent attempts at mastery as the subject grapples with adequately and coherently articulating a narrative of selfhood. The necessarily unsayable, unknowable elements of identity inhibit the subject's ability to narrate herself, bringing to the fore the inexpressible relationality at the heart of being.

This unknowingness renders the subject vulnerable, suggests Butler, and it is precisely the subject's awareness of his or her own vulnerability that reveals the fragility of the other. This vulnerability, perhaps nowhere more evident than after the death of a loved one, places the subject in the position of victim. Rather than wallow in a sense of isolated victimhood, however, a recognition of the vulnerability of the self can engender a partial understanding of the precariousness of the other:

The disorientation of grief—"Who have I become?" or, indeed, "What is left of me?" "What is it in the Other that I have lost?"—posits the "I" in the mode of unknowingness. But this can be a point of departure for a new understanding if the narcissistic preoccupation of melancholia can be moved into a consideration of the vulnerability of others. Then we might critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others.³⁰²

Rather than safeguard the other as a mirror image of the subject in a bid to preserve the self, Butler encourages an ethical mode of grief that opens us up to the precariousness of life. If the 'I' can so readily be undone and dispossessed by loss, then so can the other. Importantly for the theorization of new modes of working upon, Butler's conceptualization of grief beyond melancholia is as relevant for the living as it is for the dead. Indeed, the current preoccupation with the past and its lost others, while welcome, is sometimes at risk of obscuring the present and those 'ungrievable lives' that will never be mourned because they do not register as lives.³⁰³ Rather than advocate, as does Spargo, for melancholia as an ethical response to loss because it enacts the belated safeguarding of the other, Butler highlights the need for an ethics

³⁰² Ibid., p. 30.

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 35.

of loss that begins with the vulnerability of the other when s/he is alive. Emergent modes of working upon are thus particularly concerned with examining the discursive connections between self and other, past and present, in a bid to theorize the issue of remembrance as a perpetually evolving and ever-present phenomenon rather than a retrospective practice.

Tracing Loss in Literature

Literature, envisaged as a ghostly medium, is frequently seen to privilege tropes of haunting and melancholia.³⁰⁴ Narratives encode loss within their very structures, and the inherent plurality of literature, which foregrounds the gaps, silences, and aporias in discourse, make it an important space in which to trace spectral moments of return. Yet literature is also seen to embody and (re)construct memory in the wake of loss, playing an important role in the preservation, remembrance, and transmission of effaced or traumatic histories.³⁰⁵ As Sarah Henstra has recently argued, ‘the twentieth century’s “memory boom” places heavier-than-ever demands upon the consolatory powers of literature’.³⁰⁶ Literature is employed as a framework for enacting historical anamnesis and, in the case of minoritarian groups, it enables the textual inscription of what has been lost. Yet even if the past cannot be recovered, argues Durrant in a discussion of postcolonial narratives, literature still seems to fulfil a palliative function; in this sense, he contends, ‘the aim of the postcolonial narrative would at first sight appear to be similar to that of psychoanalysis’.³⁰⁷ Durrant goes on to question the ethico-political role of postcolonial literature in the wake of colonization, ultimately probing whether

³⁰⁴ Barclay, p. xxxvi; Ramadanovic, p. 100.

³⁰⁵ Henstra, p. 1.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁰⁷ Durrant, p. 8.

the novelist should seek closure and healing or instead re-enact, via aporetic and fragmented structures, the suffering and incomprehensibility of past traumas:

Should postcolonial novelists follow the example of psychoanalysis and seek to transform melancholia into mourning, or should they allow the endlessness of grief to overwhelm the literary work? Should their work offer some form of healing or closure or continue to testify to the disproportionate measures or racial oppression by somehow transgressing the limits of their own composition?³⁰⁸

Durrant's questioning clearly rehearses wider debate concerning the role and form of memory work, similarly imagining grief and loss according to the self-same Freudian binarism employed by many contemporary scholars. And like much recent theory, Durrant suggests that postcolonial literature often does seek to maintain the melancholic, traumatized condition in the name of ethics.³⁰⁹

If 'melancholia [...] undermines the empirical basis for, and chronological order of, the story of loss it might seem to tell',³¹⁰ then melancholic literature can be interpreted as a discursive narrative form that refutes closure via a series of substitutions, repetitions, and haunting returns. As Henstra argues, 'melancholia [i]s a *narrative and rhetorical mode* evident in fiction that seeks deliberately to avoid consolatory and redemptive themes in relation to loss'.³¹¹ This particular strand of literature linguistically and formally enacts the metatextual renunciation of Freudian mourning, echoing what she terms the 'counter-monument' and 'counter-memorial' paradigms of recent years.³¹² The paradox, of course, is that narratives are linguistic structures that risk inaugurating a form of introjection or mourning. Even if, as Ramadanovic contends, a 'complete novel', much like the completed work of mourning, is largely inconceivable, texts are always at risk of exorcizing the very

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

³¹⁰ Enterline, p. 16.

³¹¹ Henstra, p. 18.

³¹² Ibid., p. 10.

ghosts they resurrect.³¹³ Literature thus embodies the paradox inherent to trauma theory: it is both a marker of haunting and absence and a linguistic substitution of loss.

The recent novels of Assia Djébar give expression to this tension, engaging with tropes of haunting at the self-same time they attempt to recover effaced and marginalized Algerian histories. Her recent corpus is particularly concerned with haunting, trauma, and melancholia, forming part of what Rosello deems to be a larger “‘hantologie” algérienne’, in which the leitmotifs of spectres and phantoms challenge official historiography and give expression to Algeria’s silenced figures.³¹⁴ Part I of the thesis problematizes melancholia, beginning with Chapter One, ‘Appropriating the Other: On the Ethics of Melancholia in Assia Djébar’s *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* (1995) and *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002)’, which explores the vicissitudes of Djébar’s turn to haunting and melancholia.³¹⁵ Echoing the approach of many of the theorists outlined in this introduction, Djébar first engages with these concepts as ethical and politically engaged forms of resistance. As she does so, however, she consciously probes the ethical limits of these paradigms, countering the contemporary celebration of haunting and melancholia, and inciting us to reconsider their usefulness. If, in *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, Djébar’s misgivings are tempered by the more pressing desire to give a voice to the dead and forgotten of the Algerian War and the civil war of the 1990s, by the time she publishes *La Femme sans sépulture* her critique of melancholia and haunting is altogether more evident. Her own resurrection of Zoulikha Oudai, a resistance fighter during the *guerre d’Algérie*, is fraught with ambiguity as she probes the debilitating effects of haunting not merely on the ghost herself but also on Zoulikha’s daughters.

³¹³ Ramadanovic, p. 109.

³¹⁴ Mireille Rosello, ‘Rencontres et disparus chez Assia Djébar’, *Expressions maghrébines*, 2 (2003), 91-111 (p. 93).

³¹⁵ Assia Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002)

Chapter Two, ‘Melancholic Victimhood in Boualem Sansal’s *Le Village de l’Allemand: ou Le journal des frères Schiller* (2008)’, analyses the devastating and symbiotic relationship between melancholia and victimhood.³¹⁶ If, in *La Femme sans sépulture*, the melancholic condition of Zoulikha’s daughters can be read in light of Abraham and Torok’s theory of the phantom, Sansal’s novel reveals the latent transgenerational effects of silence and trauma on the offspring of a Holocaust perpetrator. In this novel the son’s melancholic and narcissistic attachment to his father destroys his sense of self. He identifies as both his father and as the victims of the Holocaust, leading to a state of vicarious victimhood in which he usurps the subject-position of the gas-chamber victim. In Chapter Three, ‘Nostalgic Returns in Assia Djébar’s *La Disparition de la langue française* (2003)’, I examine the relationship between melancholia and nostalgia to reveal how Berkane’s attempts to recover the lost Algerian homeland lead to a series of displacements and substitutions that can never satiate loss.³¹⁷ Djébar’s narrative reveals the dangers of a retrospective gaze that is blind to the politics of the present—in this case the rise of Islamism in Algeria—suggesting that neurotic attempts to memorialize the past hinder an ethical engagement with the present. Chapter Four, ‘Melancholic Violence and the Spectre of Failed Ideals in Gillo Pontecorvo’s *La Bataille d’Alger* (1966) and Yasmina Khadra’s *À quoi rêvent les loups* (1999)’, juxtaposes both texts to examine the melancholic relationship between the war of independence and the Algerian civil war.³¹⁸ Building upon the work of Ranjana Khanna, who views the Algerian War as a melancholic response to the failed ideals of French universalism, this chapter reads the civil

³¹⁶ Boualem Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand: ou Le journal des frères Schiller* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008)

³¹⁷ Assia Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003)

³¹⁸ *La Bataille d’Alger*, dir. by Gillo Pontecorvo (Argent Films, 1999 [1966]); Yasmina Khadra, *À quoi rêvent les loups* (Paris: Julliard, 1999)

war as the corollary of the failed ideals of the anticolonial war.³¹⁹ Khadra's novel reveals the importance of working upon the lost—or perhaps even absent—ideals of the independence movement in order to 'break free' of the haunting elements of history.

Part II analyses the ways in which Djébar, Khadra, and Sansal seek modes of working upon the past that move beyond the Freudian binary of mourning and melancholia. Chapter Five, 'Detective Fiction and 'Working Upon': Investigating the (Post) Colonial Past in Boualem Sansal's *Le Serment des barbares* (1999) and Yasmina Khadra's *La Part du mort* (2004)', examines how Sansal and Khadra deploy the structures of detective fiction in order to work upon the historical connections between past and present.³²⁰ Building upon LaCapra and Rosello's conceptualization of working through as an ethico-political model, I reveal how the detective novels enact a process of working upon the past that resists redemptive closure at the self-same time it refuses to fetishize and maintain the traumatic condition. The novels reveal that a process of memorialization must view the past through the lens of the present if it is to circumvent the sterile repetition of past events. Finally, Chapter Six, 'Auto-analyse and Autofiction: Reworking the Self-Other Dyad in Assia Djébar's *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (2007)', turns to Djébar's latest autofictional text in order to theorize a form of working upon that re-examines the relationship between self and other.³²¹ Taking into account Butler's ethical theorization of grief as something that must first recognize the vulnerability of the subject, I argue that Djébar calls for a process of working upon that begins with a return to the self. Her latest text thus represents a marked shift away from tropes of haunting towards a model of grief and remembrance that embraces, rather than denies, the self's imbrication in

³¹⁹ Khanna, *Dark Continents*, p. 23.

³²⁰ Boualem Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999); Yasmina Khadra, *Le Quatuor algérien: les enquêtes du commissaire Llob* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009)

³²¹ Assia Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (Paris: Fayard, 2007)

the lost object. It is precisely by accepting that the subject is, to use Butler's term, 'undone' by the other in the wake of loss that one can begin a transformative process of working upon that might transcend the debilitating, yet strangely persistent, Freudian binary of mourning and melancholia.³²²

This thesis thus intends to demonstrate how an ethico-politics of melancholia is only possible insofar as one consistently and resolutely overlooks its imbrication in modes of forgetting, distortion, and sterile repetition. Far from operating as an ethical model, melancholia reads as a desperate attempt to appropriate the lost object in a bid to preserve the self; it signifies resistance to change that can, at worst, facilitate social conservatism and political apathy. In valorizing the past to the detriment of the present, it leaves the subject, and its objects, ensnared in a perpetual and debilitating state of in-between. The aim of this thesis, then, is to reveal the different ways in which melancholia proves troubling for the recent memory boom. If the degree to which both melancholia and haunting have been deployed in recent years suggests an overarching and ultimately commendable desire to keep the past alive, this thesis intends to build upon this to call for emergent and ethical mnemonic models that are open to change and which, in attending to the past, do not lose sight of the future.

³²² Butler, *Prekarious Life*, p. 23.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

**Appropriating the Other: On the Ethics of Melancholia in Assia Djébar's
Le Blanc de l'Algérie (1995) and *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002)**

Mourning also wants to get rid of the past, to exorcise it, albeit under the guise of respectful commemoration. To forget the dead altogether is impious in ways that prepare their own retribution, but to remember the dead is neurotic and obsessive and merely feeds a sterile repetition. There is no 'proper' way of relating to the dead and the past.

*Fredric Jameson*¹

While Assia Djébar's oeuvre has always been socio-politically informed and concerned with the applications of history and memory in (post)colonial Algeria, the immediacy of the civil war of the 1990s saw the beginning of a marked shift in her literary production.² Published only two years after Jacques Derrida's seminal text *Spectres de Marx*, Djébar's meditation on the violence of the 1990s, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, can be read as a discursive exploration of the Derridean premise that haunting is a historical, politically engaged medium. If, in *Spectres de Marx*, Derrida pits mourning in direct opposition to melancholic haunting, in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* Djébar rejects the formulaic, official narratives of mourning endemic to postcolonial Algeria in favour of a model of melancholia that resists the effacement of the lost other.³ Djébar ostensibly deploys mourning and melancholia as a binary, though the distinction between them falters as her narrative tentatively problematizes the ethics of conjuring the ghosts of the past. In her poignant analysis of grief she also raises some of the ethical issues addressed by Derrida in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, at times troubling his

¹ Fredric Jameson, 'Marx's Purloined Letter', in *Ghostly Demarcations: a Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*, ed. by Michael Sprinker (London; New York: Verso, 2008), pp. 26-67 (pp. 58-59).

² Hafid Gafaïti, *La Diasporisation de la littérature postcoloniale: Assia Djébar, Rachid Mimouni* (Paris: Harmattan, 2005), p. 189.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p. 30.

conceptualization of the self-other relationship to reveal how the subject risks appropriating the object in the wake of loss. The underlying unease that haunts *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* can also be traced throughout Djébar's later novel, *La Femme sans sépulture*, which sees the author enact the textual resurrection of the ghost of Zoulikha Oudai, a resistance fighter during the Algerian war of independence. In this narrative Djébar examines in detail the multiple dangers of appropriating the ghosts of the past, troubling the ostensibly ethical relationship between melancholic haunting and the effaced or lost other.

Djébar's disquiet thus becomes more apparent as the years proceed, but it is in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* that her concerns first come to the fore. In this text Djébar resurrects the ghosts of political figures and artists alike, amongst them Frantz Fanon, Jean Sénac, and Albert Camus. Individuals such as Abane Ramdane, a *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) fighter brutally murdered for critiquing his organization, haunt the narrative as 'ombres dérangeantes', disturbing the misleading accounts of the Algerian War that continue to legitimize the FLN to this day.⁴ Concomitantly, Djébar also invokes the spectres of her late friends and colleagues, including Tahar Djaout and Abdelkader Alloula, several of whom were killed during the civil war by Islamists or the government. Their use of the French language—an ostensibly European medium of protest—rendered them double targets as both factions posited themselves against a homogenized West. By re-inscribing and resuscitating these individuals in French, then, Djébar endeavours to elicit an alternative narrative of postcolonial Algeria that would challenge its monocausal nationalism and call attention to the faceless or repressed victims of (post)colonial violence.⁵

⁴ For a contemporary critique of the FLN's continued manipulation of history, see Boualem Sansal, *Poste Restante, Alger: lettre de colère et d'espoir à mes compatriotes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008)

⁵ Hafid Gafaïti, 'Assia Djébar, l'écriture et la mort', in *Assia Djébar*, ed. by Najib Redouane et Yvette Bénayoun-Szmid (Paris: Harmattan, 2008), pp. 227-38 (p. 229).

While *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* succeeds in unsettling the foundational myths surrounding Algeria's emergence as a postcolonial nation, however, it also offers a subtle critique of melancholic haunting. Inasmuch as Djébar's narrative is historically and politically constituted, then, it is also a deeply personal meditation on grief that probes the author's ambiguous response to the loss of the singular other. Structured around the deaths and funerals of her close friends, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* is profoundly concerned with friendship and the ethics of mourning. As Djébar intimates in the text's opening passage, the issue of how best to memorialize the radical alterity of the other is at the heart of her narrative:

J'ai voulu, dans ce récit, répondre à une exigence de mémoire immédiate: la mort d'amis proches (un sociologue, un psychiatre et un auteur dramatique); raconter quelques éclats d'une amitié ancienne, mais décrire aussi, pour chacun, le jour de l'assassinat et des funérailles—ce que chacun de ces trois intellectuels représentait, dans sa singularité et son authenticité, pour les siens, pour sa ville d'origine, sa tribu.⁶

As Djébar stresses the importance of attending to what she terms the singularity and authenticity of her late friends, her words call to mind Derrida's ethical project, particularly as it emerges in the collection *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*. Each of Derrida's public yet mindfully private obituaries in memory of key thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Emmanuel Levinas, and Paul de Man reveals the difficulties of speaking of and to the singular other without erasing him through the very act of writing. Concerned with the ethics of friendship, his essays probe the manner in which 'le deuil qui suit la mort se prépare et s'anticipe bien avant la mort, et combien cette anticipation est le temps même de l'amitié'.⁷ Like Djébar, Derrida emphasizes the singularity of each individual, evoking in his preface the concept of the "seul et unique" qui fait de chaque vivant (animal, humain ou divin), un vivant seul et

⁶ Assia Djébar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 11.

⁷ Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, 'Introduction: Compter avec les morts, Jacques Derrida et la politique du deuil', in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, ed. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Paris: Galilée, 2003), pp. 15-56 (p. 51).

unique'.⁸ Formally speaking, the sections of *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* entitled 'Trois journées' and 'Processions', in which Djébar both resurrects and memorializes the lives, deaths, and funerals of diverse figures, reflects Derrida's self-professed 'résurrection' of his friends and colleagues in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*.⁹

By articulating the lost other in language, that is, by substituting the signifier for the referent, Djébar, like Derrida, risks engendering a process of forgetting akin to Freudian mourning. If, in their introduction to *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas contend that there is paradoxically no other way to publically remember the other in the wake of death,¹⁰ Djébar is nonetheless at pains to avoid constructing a linguistic mausoleum for her 'chers disparus'.¹¹ She deliberately enacts a process of remembrance that circumvents the hackneyed clichés of public memorials associated with postcolonial Algeria, thus evading the normalizing closure of 'conventional narrative[s]' that seek finitude or redemption.¹² Djébar instead yields the metaphor of 'la mort inachevée' to give expression to the unrelenting trauma that her writing exhibits;¹³ it speaks to a grief that cannot be assimilated because death came too abruptly and too violently for the author to comprehend.¹⁴ As Jenny Murray explains:

Her reaction to this trauma manifests itself as a melancholic obsession with reconstructing her friends' final moments. [...]. The metaphor of "la mort inachevée"

⁸ Derrida, 'Avant-propos', in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, ed. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Paris: Galilée, 2003), pp. 9-11 (p. 11).

⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰ Brault and Naas, p. 52.

¹¹ Djébar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, p. 15. See Mireille Rosello, 'Rencontres et disparus chez Assia Djébar', *Expressions Maghrébines*, 2 (2003), 91-111 (p. 108). This is in contrast to Mireille Calle-Gruber's argument that *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* figures as a 'tombeau littéraire'. Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Assia Djébar ou la résistance de l'écriture: Regards d'un écrivain d'Algérie* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001), p. 118. See also Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Assia Djébar* (Paris: Association pour la diffusion de la pensée française, 2006), p. 82.

¹² Dominick LaCapra, 'Trauma Absence, Loss', *Critical Inquiry*, 25 (1999), 696-727 (p. 703). See also Jane Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar: Out of Algeria* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), p. 133.

¹³ Djébar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, p. 233.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 90.

thus comes to symbolise a process of mourning which has been interrupted or suspended.¹⁵

The symbol of ‘la mort inachevée’ signifies Djébar’s anguished response to trauma, which sees her invoke the unfinished deaths of her friends.

Yet if her melancholia is, at times, figured as an inevitable manifestation of the traumatic condition, the spectralized other is also invoked at will in an ethico-political act of resistance. In ‘La langue des morts’ Djébar describes her phantomogenic relationship with the spectres of three departed friends: the dramatist Kader (Abdelkader) Alloula, the sociologist M’Hamed Boukhobza, and the psychiatrist Mahfoud Boucebc. It is germane that it should be the French language, transformed into a spectral dialect, which facilitates exchange: ‘le français d’autrefois désormais se régénère en nous, entre nous, transmué en langue des morts’.¹⁶ At times, ‘La langue des morts’ can be read as a literary exploration of Derrida’s appeal in *Spectres de Marx* that we ‘apprendre à vivre avec les fantômes, dans l’entretien, la compagnie ou le compagnonnage, dans le commerce sans commerce des fantômes’.¹⁷ Describing Kader, M’Hamed, and Mahfoud as ‘Ombres qui murmurent’, Djébar contends:¹⁸ ‘Ces chers disparus; ils me parlent maintenant; ils me parlent’.¹⁹ In *Spectres de Marx* haunting is construed as a mode of address in which discourse is mediated from the dead to the living, and in ‘La langue des morts’ Djébar also suggests that haunting creates a space in which language and dialogue are free flowing, unfettered by the conventions and mores of society:

¹⁵ Jenny Murray, ‘La mort inachevée: Writing, Remembering, and Forgetting in Assia Djébar’s *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, *La Disparition de la langue française* and *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*’, in *Anamnesia: Private and Public Memory in Modern French Culture*, ed. by Peter Collier, Anna Magdalena Elsner and Olga Smith (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 71-83 (p. 73).

¹⁶ Djébar, *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, p. 18.

¹⁷ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, p. 15.

¹⁸ Djébar, *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, p. 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

‘ils me parlent à présent, et pleinement’.²⁰ The language of death is figured as abundant and altogether more fruitful than the language of the living, marked as it is by inherent lack.

At times, melancholic haunting is conceived as a framework that circumvents the issues of (mis)representation and agency outlined at length by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’.²¹ Similarly, Derrida’s insistence upon the dialogical aspects of haunting in the early stages of *Spectres de Marx* gives way to the importance of listening to the spectralized other:

le “savant” de l’avenir, l’“intellectuel” de demain [...] devrait apprendre à vivre en apprenant non pas à faire la conversation avec le fantôme mais à s’entretenir avec lui, avec elle, à lui laisser ou à lui rendre la parole.²²

For Derrida, conversation becomes secondary to listening or, in the words of Dominique Fisher, to constructing ‘un espace d’écoute’.²³ Djébar gestures to this when she contends, ‘Ils viennent à moi, mes amis, je ne les ai pas appelés’, thus figuring herself as receiving rather than invoking her spectral visitors.²⁴ Djébar is thus particularly anxious not to become the *porte-parole* of the dead, and she is careful to portray Kader, M’Hamed, and Mahfoud as speaking entities with their own authentic voice: ‘Heureusement, ils me parlent souvent, ces “chers”’.²⁵

For all her insistence upon the ghosts’ agency, however, it is, of course, Djébar herself who selects the memories that are to haunt the present—or indeed to which she is to return—framing them according to her own desires within her own literary narrative. Acutely conscious of this, Djébar does concede that her friends only continue to exist within the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

²¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: a Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Harlow: Pearson, 1994), pp. 66-111.

²² Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, p. 279.

²³ Dominique D. Fisher, *Écrire l’urgence, Assia Djébar et Tahar Djaout* (Paris: Harmattan, 2007), p. 131.

²⁴ Djébar, *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, p. 18.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

confines or her imagination: ‘*Ils m’ont quittée malgré moi. Je reste là, et si je tourne la tête et si je crois voir le désert, alors je me trompe, je m’aveugle, je m’illusionne!*’.²⁶ Emphasizing her own blindness, Djébar suggests that the dead do not really exist in reality but are instead conjured at will. For Derrida, this distinction between the dead other alive within the self’s imagination and the dead other living in and of himself is a wholly ethical one: ‘il serait infidèle de se leurrer encore jusqu’à croire que l’autre vivant *en nous* est vivant *en lui-même*: parce qu’il vit *en nous* et que nous vivons ceci ou cela en sa mémoire, en mémoire de lui’.²⁷ To believe that the dead other continues in death as he did in life is unfaithful to the memory of that individual.

Nonetheless, the editors of *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* also point to the blindness inherent to the obituary form utilized by Derrida, contending that:

L’oraison funèbre est un genre guetté de tous côtés par la mauvaise foi, l’aveuglement, et, bien sûr, la dénégation. Car même lorsque nous parlons aux morts simplement pour leur demander pardon, c’est bien souvent parce que nous ne voulons pas admettre qu’ils ne peuvent plus nous répondre, et, par exemple, nous offrir leur pardon.²⁸

In this passage the ethical desire to maintain a relationship with the spectralized other is overshadowed by the underlying possibility that the subject resurrects the ghost only insofar as it can alleviate guilt and assuage the self. Certainly in *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* Djébar’s resurrection of her friends is imbricated in her desire to make amends for the past, as she regrets that she did not articulate the true depths of her friendship.²⁹ She expresses remorse for having harmed Kader—‘je souffre d’avoir causé du chagrin, une fois—une seule fois, il est vrai—à Kader’—while also contending:³⁰

²⁶ Ibid., p. 146.

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1988) p. 43.

²⁸ Brault and Naas, p. 23.

²⁹ Djébar, *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, p. 232.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 232.

Je m'attriste de n'avoir pas annulé un voyage pour rester à Paris et donc de n'avoir pas bavardé une ultime soirée avec Mahfoud [...]. J'écris et je sèche quelques larmes. Je ne crois pas en leur mort: en cela, pour moi, elle est inachevée.³¹

Her guilt and sorrow over this missed opportunity with Mahfoud lays bare a self-referential kind of grief: Djébar's own sadness and tears obscure the singular other, whose own sentiments are absent. In juxtaposing her regrets with the spectral return of her friends, she thus marks a correlation between haunting and the desire for pardon.

Djébar's resurrection of Zoulikha in *La Femme sans sépulture* also manifests the author's guilt concerning the belatedness of her project. Having begun the narrative in 1981, almost twenty years after independence, Djébar did not finalize it until 2001:

Je reviens si tard et je me décide à dérouler enfin le récit! Ce retard me perturbe, me trouble, me culpabilise. Comme si mon lieu d'origine s'arrachait, mais à quoi: à mon propre oubli?³²

While Djébar's invocation of the spectre is undoubtedly a predominantly ethical enterprise, by her own admission it is also a conciliatory gesture that enables her to ask for forgiveness, thus underscoring the possibility that melancholic haunting is more self- than other-oriented. In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler similarly points to the self-referential nature of melancholia, arguing that:

The melancholic refuses the loss of the object, and internalization becomes a strategy of magically resuscitating the lost object, not only because the loss is painful, but because the ambivalence felt toward the object requires that the object be retained until differences are settled.³³

Building upon Freud's assertion that melancholic subject-object relations are inherently ambivalent, Butler postulates that the subject's incorporation of the lost object is not simply a latent attempt to alleviate the grief inflicted upon the ego, but also an attempt to contend with

³¹ Ibid., p. 232.

³² Assia Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 239.

³³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 83-84.

the ambiguous feelings that the subject may harbour in relation to the object.³⁴ In other words, the putatively ethical preservation of the object might belie the subject's desperate need to address the other.

As Djébar remembers the dead in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* she exposes a latent desire for self-preservation that undermines the ethics of melancholia: '*Oh, mes amis, pas le blanc de l'oubli, je vous en prie, préservez-moi!*'³⁵ The haunting return of the other is presented here as a form of appropriation that maintains the status quo, disavowing the destructive forces of grief. Freud articulates this in 'Mourning and Melancholia', suggesting that the narcissistically-loved object is maintained precisely because the acknowledgement of loss would engender a concomitant loss of ego.³⁶ The German psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich have since built upon this to suggest that, for the melancholic, 'The pain is not in grief for the lost object; instead, the grief is for oneself'.³⁷ Geoffrey Bennington, in the introduction to his 'Militantly Melancholic' monograph in memory of Derrida, has also critiqued the self-referential nature of much contemporary theory, arguing that: 'A lot of the recent talk about 'the other', in all its supposedly 'ethical' piety, is in fact a fairly transparent alibi for just this kind of self-interest'.³⁸ His caveat remains a stark reminder that even the most well-intentioned of gestures can unwittingly mask the appropriative desires of the self, a tension that Djébar's own writing project, described as a form of 'autodéfense', exhibits.³⁹

³⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *On the History of the Psycho-analytic Movement: Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 243-58 (p. 256).

³⁵ Djébar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, p. 56.

³⁶ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 247.

³⁷ Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, trans. by Beverley R. Placzek (New York: Grove Press, 1975), p. 63.

³⁸ Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 39.

³⁹ Djébar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, p. 233.

Cryptophoria and the Exquisite Corpse

The very tensions that trouble *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* can be traced throughout *La Femme sans sépulture*. In this narrative the resurrection of Zoulikha's ghost, which sees her speaking from beyond the grave, is juxtaposed with a belated process of memorialization. The women of the town of Césarée, from which Djébar and Zoulikha both originate, initiate a form of remembering that risks, at times, inaugurating a process of mourning that might efface her memory. Nicole Aas-Rouxparis has underscored the way in which the novel borrows from a range of genres, including from 'l'art de l'interview', and in many ways the author-narrator figure operates as a pseudo-psychoanalyst, engaging the characters in a belated process of introjection:⁴⁰ 'cette inconnue [...] déclenche, par son arrivée, des tornades de souvenirs'.⁴¹ Meditating upon the remembering of the past, 'l'intervieweuse' thus muses: 'N'est-ce pas une stratégie inconsciente pour [...] nous découvrir... libérées? De quoi, sinon de l'ombre même du passé muet, immobile, une falaise au-dessus de notre tête...'.⁴² Addressing the *intervieweuse* Zoulikha's daughter Hania also adds, 'avec toi [...] si je parle d'elle, je me soulage, je me débarrasse des dents de l'amertume', portraying introjection as a healing, palliative process.⁴³ Yet at the same time Hania also contends: 'Face aux journalistes [...] j'ai l'impression, en déroulant des mots... [...] en parlant de Zoulikha, il me semble que, à mon tour, je la tue!'.⁴⁴ Djébar thus begins a process of 'working through', but she does so

⁴⁰ Nicole Aas-Rouxparis, 'La Femme-oiseau de la mosaïque: Image et chant dans *La Femme sans sépulture* d'Assia Djébar', *Nouvelles Etudes Francophones*, 19 (2004), 97-108 (p. 97). If, in this chapter, I utilize the terms 'author-narrator' and 'intervieweuse' to refer to Djébar, this is for the sake of clarity and is not meant to imply that Djébar and the narrator figure are interchangeable. Indeed, the relationship between an author and her characters, even the most autobiographical ones, is inherently ambiguous.

⁴¹ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 50.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 142.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50. Mina's anxiety over the figurative death of her mother reflects David Eng and Shinhee Han's belief that 'mourner is perfectly content with killing off the lost object, declaring it to be dead yet again within the domain of the psyche'. See David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, 'A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia', in *Loss*:

falteringly, aware that to complete such mourning, to bring about the textualization of loss—if indeed such completion is possible—is to risk a form of exorcism.

The text thus appears to be ensnared in a process of oscillation between mourning and melancholia or, in the words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, introjection and incorporation. For Anne Donadey, this movement between incorporation and introjection means that the text ‘remains *en suspens*, suspended in the to and fro motion from one to another’.⁴⁵ Both Jenny Murray and Donadey have pointed to the useful parallels between Abraham and Torok’s theories and *La Femme sans sépulture*; Donadey in particular contends that, ‘Introjection *and* incorporation are [...] at the heart of Djébar’s aesthetic’.⁴⁶ For Donadey, however, this movement remains unproblematic and simply marks Djébar’s wider literary aesthetic as well as the way in which mourning and melancholia sometimes form part of what Dominick LaCapra terms ‘working through’.⁴⁷ I would venture, however, that Djébar’s treatment of melancholic incorporation in *La Femme sans sépulture* is much more problematic than Donadey would allow. Indeed, the narrative’s suspended and interstitial structure is less a product of the movement between mourning and melancholia than it is an effect of melancholia’s debilitating repetition. If the text gestures towards the need to move beyond the traumatic condition, it nonetheless remains largely melancholic, ultimately reaching a juncture that speaks to the difficulties of inaugurating an ethical remembrance of the past.⁴⁸

The Politics of Mourning, ed. by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 343-71 (p. 365).

⁴⁵ Anne Donadey, ‘Introjection and Incorporation in Assia Djébar’s *La Femme sans sépulture*’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 48 (2008), 81-91 (p. 88).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88. See Jenny Murray, ‘Haunting Memories of the Mother in Assia Djébar’s *La Femme sans sépulture*’, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 5 (2007), 72-91.

⁴⁷ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 206

⁴⁸ Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar*, p. 167.

There are several direct references to melancholia throughout the novel and Zoulikha's daughters Hania and Mina are prevented from beginning a process of introjection.⁴⁹ Their grief arises from the sudden, traumatic death of their mother, Zoulikha, at the hands of French officers during the Algerian War, but is exacerbated by the lack of a gravesite: 'je n'ai même pas une tombe où aller m'incliner le vendredi', laments Hania.⁵⁰ The lack of any physical remains prevents Hania from engaging in mourning or introjection for, as Derrida remarks in *Spectres de Marx*, 'Rien ne serait pire, pour le travail du deuil, que la confusion ou le doute: il faut savoir qui est enterré où'.⁵¹ Unable to locate her mother's body, Hania becomes possessed by the desire to do so as the title of the chapter concerning her grief attests: '*Où trouver le corps de ma mère?*'.⁵² The phrase resurfaces several times throughout the text, with slight modifications, as a haunting, melancholic refrain, emphasizing Hania's fixation upon finding her mother's body: 'Dites-moi, vous qui arrivez si longtemps après: où trouver le corps de ma mère?'.⁵³

The traumatic circumstances surrounding her mother's death, as well as the lack of a tomb, mean that Hania struggles to articulate her loss in language: 'Je ne pouvais plus prononcer son prénom'.⁵⁴ Unable to begin a process of linguistic introjection, she inters her mother within her own psychic topography, in a manner that reflects Abraham and Torok's theory of cryptophoria. Hania's phantasmal incorporation of Zoulikha thus substitutes for her inability to articulate loss, a substitution that, in the words of Abraham and Torok, involves the appropriation of 'tout ou partie d'une personne, seule dépositaire de ce qui n'a pas de

⁴⁹ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, pp. 92, 146, 150, 151.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵¹ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, p. 30.

⁵² Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 47.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

nom'.⁵⁵ Hania similarly describes herself as 'habitée' by the ghost of her mother and this gesture towards cryptophilia is substantiated by the author-narrator who states:⁵⁶

Quêter sans fin la mère, ou plutôt, se dit-elle, c'est la mère en la fille, par les pores de celle-ci, la mère, oui, qui sue et s'exhale. Un jour, c'est sûr, tenace comme une sourde-muette, la mère en elle, entêtée, soudain murmurante, la guidera jusqu'à la forêt et à la sépulture cachée.⁵⁷

Hania engages in a fantasy of incorporation, maintaining Zoulikha as a living, breathing entity within her own psychic topography. This kind of crypt, according to Abraham and Torok, 'désigne aussi, pour le patient, l'occasion du tourment, un souvenir qu'il avait enterré, *sans sépulture légale*, [...] en attendant sa résurrection'.⁵⁸ Indeed, Hania constructs her own tomb *sans sépulture légale* in place of *la femme sans sépulture* in the hope that one day her mother's phantom might finally lead her to the hidden burial place in the forest.

Hania's failed attempts to locate her mother's burial site engender what is referred to by Abraham and Torok as 'le fantasme du cadavre exquis'.⁵⁹ Frequently associated with the formation of the crypt, 'le rêve du "cadavre exquis" revient avec constance dans la maladie du deuil'.⁶⁰ Hania likewise experiences recurrent dreams, in which she finally locates her mother's 'majestic corpse': 'sa sépulture majestueuse, apparaissant en vain dans [son] rêve'.⁶¹ As Freud contends, dreams are essentially wish-fulfillments, and Hania's desire to locate her mother's body is rendered explicit:⁶² 'Plusieurs fois je vis, dans un rêve, sa sépulture: illuminé, isolé, un monument superbe, et je pleurais sans fin devant ce mausolée', she states, before lamenting, 'j'étais certaine [...] que sa tombe, je la retrouverais et que je pleurerais,

⁵⁵ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *L'Écorce et le noyau* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), p. 264.

⁵⁶ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 92.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁸ Abraham and Torok, p. 297.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 245.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 249.

⁶¹ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 63.

⁶² Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. by Joyce Crick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 360.

enfin soulagée, comme dans mes rêves!'.⁶³ While this dream normally connotes the unconscious desire to unearth a hidden secret, in Hania's case it operates on two symbolic levels as the figurative desire to uncover Zoulikha's phantomogenic secret and the literal desire to recover her mother's body.

Like Hania, Mina is similarly unable to introject the memory of her mother. She too constructs an intrapsychic tomb within herself that has clear parallels with Abraham and Torok's notion of the crypt:

Tous les mots qui n'auront pu être dits, toutes les scènes qui n'auront pu être remémorées, toutes les larmes qui n'auront pu être versées, seront avalés, en même temps que le traumatisme, cause de la perte. Avalés et *mis en conserve*.⁶⁴

Mina remarks upon her inability to grieve for her mother, claiming: 'jamais je n'ai pu la pleurer, un nœud me reste là'.⁶⁵ Instead, she contends: 'Je ne réveille pas les morts, je les porte vivants, peut-être tout au plus embaumés à l'égyptienne, puis se dépliant peu à peu dans la pénombre'.⁶⁶ In a striking image that has parallels with Abraham and Torok's own visualization of the crypt as being comparable to 'un cocon autour de la chrysalide', Mina likens the structure of her intrapsychic tomb to that of an Egyptian mummy, embalmed and preserved forever.⁶⁷

By figuring Hania and Mina as the guardians of Zoulikha's crypt, Djébar does not merely demonstrate the mechanism by which incorporation occurs; she also opens up a textual space in which to engage with the ethics of incorporation. In particular, Mina's iconic image of the Egyptian mummy has parallels with Derrida's concept of the ghost, in his essay in memory of Roland Barthes, as 'l'autre dans le même [...], le tout autre mort vivant en

⁶³ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 61.

⁶⁴ Abraham and Torok, p. 266.

⁶⁵ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 103.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁶⁷ Abraham and Torok, p. 297.

moi'.⁶⁸ While Derrida does not idealize incorporation, he nevertheless invests it with the ability to preserve the alterity of the other and is quick to deny any charges of narcissism: 'Si narcissisme il y avait, sa structure resterait assez complexe pour que l'autre, mort ou vivant, ne s'y réduise pas au même'.⁶⁹ For Derrida, the relationship between self and other is too multifaceted to admit of narcissism, yet it is precisely the melancholic's unconscious identification with the other that renders narcissism a recurrent possibility.⁷⁰

Thus if Djébar's portrayal of incorporation might initially be read as a literary exposition of Derridean theory, on closer inspection *La Femme sans sépulture* unveils a more complex, even circumspect, attitude towards melancholia. While Mina's incorporation of Zoulikha ostensibly appears as an ethical mode of relating to the dead that respects the binary between self and other, another image problematizes this view:

le souvenir de ma mère, je le porte comme un cercle fermé sur lui-même, moi au centre enveloppée de moire ou de taffetas raidi, me mirant parfois et parfois moi, m'obscurcissant à mon tour.⁷¹

On the one hand, Zoulikha appears to reflect an image of Mina, thus suggesting, according to Abraham and Torok's theory of the crypt, that '*l'"objet", à son tour, porte le Moi pour masque*'.⁷² In this sense, the image of Zoulikha is superseded by her daughter's presence. Yet Mina also describes herself as being obscured by the lost object, an assertion that can be read as a reference to Freud's infamous assertion in 'Mourning and Melancholia' that 'the shadow of the object fell upon the ego'.⁷³ What is more, the lost object is defined as a shimmering, iridescent presence that reflects upon the ego, pointing both to the idealization of the

⁶⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'Roland Barthes', in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, ed. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Paris: Galilée, 2003), pp. 57-97 (p. 67).

⁶⁹ Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 44.

⁷⁰ The relationship between narcissism and melancholia will be explored in more depth in Chapter Two.

⁷¹ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 202.

⁷² Abraham and Torok, p. 298.

⁷³ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 249.

incorporated imago and the way in which, in melancholia, ‘the object is quite literally the mirror, the fantasy, [and] the projection [of the subject]’.⁷⁴ Indeed, in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ Freud explains that melancholia essentially entails the ego’s identification with the lost object, intimating that the object functions narcissistically as the subject’s ego-ideal.⁷⁵ Similarly in *L’Écorce et le noyau* Abraham and Torok assert that in order for ‘*identification endocryptique*’ or incorporation to arise,⁷⁶ ‘il faut que le secret honteux ait été le fait d’un objet, jouant le rôle *d’idéal du moi*’.⁷⁷ In *La Femme sans sépulture* Zoulikha certainly operates as an ego-ideal not simply for Hania and Mina, but also for the group of women within the narrative whose stories circle around her memory: she is known as the ‘*mère des maquisards*’ and is referred to as a ‘*héroïne*’.⁷⁸

The Transgenerational Phantom

Hania also experiences disturbing symptoms that are typically associated with the phantom of the crypt. After an unsuccessful attempt to locate Zoulikha’s body, she experiences this trauma as a physical rupture: ‘Après cette déception, une sorte d’hémorragie sonore persiste. Elle n’eut plus jamais de menstrues, précisément depuis ce jour de sa recherche en forêt’.⁷⁹ According to Abraham and Torok, the sudden inability to menstruate, and hence to continue the family lineage, is a common somatic effect of the phantom, and thus Hania’s failure to reproduce can be read as an extreme form of identification with the dead imago.⁸⁰ It also signals the way in which the phantom formation ultimately dominates the life of the

⁷⁴ Mari Ruti, ‘From Melancholia to Meaning: How to Live the Past in the Present’, *Psychoanalytic Dialogues: the International Journal of Relational Perspectives*, 15 (2005), 637–60 (p. 656).

⁷⁵ Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, p. 249.

⁷⁶ Abraham and Torok, p. 298.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁷⁸ Djebbar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, pp. 15, 203.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁸⁰ Abraham and Torok, p. 316.

individual. In a monograph on the literary applications of Abraham and Torok's psychoanalytical theory, Esther Rashkin argues that:

The phantom [...] holds the individual within a group dynamic constituted by a specific formulation (and sometimes extrafamilial) topology that prevents the individual from living life as her or his own. The phantom may therefore be understood as a pathological or "diseased" form of the dual unity.⁸¹

For Rashkin, the phantomogenic parent-child paradigm limits the haunted subject and can be read as a mutated extension of the Semiotic or pre-linguistic relationship between mother and child.

Of the two daughters, it is Hania whose life is most disturbed or dominated by the haunting phantom of Zoulikha. She regularly experiences the phantom's return as an intensely corporeal form of haunting, in which phantomogenic words emanate from every part of her body:

La parole en elle coule: à partir d'elle (de ses veines et veinules, de ses entrailles obscures, parfois remontant à la tête, battant à ses tempes, bourdonnant à ses oreilles, ou brouillait sa vue, au point qu'elle voit les autres, soudain, dans un flou rosâtre ou verdâtre).⁸²

The phantom's speech physically possesses Hania, rendering the demarcation between self and other ambiguous. What is clear, however, is that Hania remains deeply affected by her inability to mourn, suffering from bouts of isolation and insomnia,⁸³ both of which are classic symptoms of Freudian melancholia.⁸⁴ Mina similarly underscores the destabilizing nature of this phantomogenic speech, claiming that:

nos souvenirs, à propos de Zoulikha, ne peuvent que tanguer, que nous rendre soudain presque schizophrènes, comme si nous n'étions pas si sûres qu'elle, la Dame sans sépulture, veuille s'exprimer à travers nous!⁸⁵

⁸¹ Esther Rashkin, *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 27.

⁸² Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 64.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁸⁴ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 253.

⁸⁵ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 94.

Mina figures Zoulikha's return as a kind of ghostly prosopopoeia that corresponds to Abraham and Torok's description of the phantom:

Son retour périodique, compulsif et échappant jusqu'à la formation des symptômes (au sens du "retour du refoulé") fonctionne comme un ventriloque, comme un étranger par rapport à la topique propre au sujet.⁸⁶

Abraham and Torok imagine the phantomogenic speech as a form of ventriloquism, but Mina's remarks develop this further, pointing to the way in which melancholia can sometimes regress to schizophrenia.⁸⁷

In spite of the allusion to speech, Zoulikha's haunting language cannot be consciously comprehended by her daughters, and *La Femme sans sépulture* underscores the chasm between Zoulikha's monologues and the daughters she addresses from beyond the grave: 'Je dois parler maintenant; je dois "te" parler', she says to Mina.⁸⁸ One reason why Hania and Mina cannot decode the phantomogenic words that emanate from the crypt is that the 'fantôme est une formation de l'inconscient qui [...] [passe] de l'inconscient d'un parent à l'inconscient d'un enfant'.⁸⁹ Secondly, the phantom deploys a particular form of anti-metaphorical language in order to protect the ego-ideal from which it emanates.⁹⁰ In an attempt to conceal the parent's shameful secret, suggest Abraham and Torok, the phantom actively secretes '[d]es mots "fantomogènes"' that point to an epistemological lacuna within the child.⁹¹ Thus in direct opposition to linguistic introjection, the phantom of the crypt marks a gap in speech and the inability to name a trauma.⁹² For Abraham and Torok, 'ce ne sont pas les trépassés qui viennent hanter, mais les lacunes laissées en nous par les secrets des autres',

⁸⁶ Abraham and Torok, p. 429.

⁸⁷ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 249.

⁸⁸ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 228.

⁸⁹ Abraham and Torok, p. 429.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 432.

and Hania alludes to this gap in knowledge when she claims:⁹³ ‘S’approfondit en moi un manque, un trou noir que je n’ai pas épuisé!’⁹⁴

Accordingly, the language secreted via the phantom is ‘cryptophoric’ and the phantomogenic words are designed to perpetuate the concealment of the parent’s secret.

Operating at the level of the unconscious:

[le fantôme] poursuit dans le silence son œuvre de déliaison. Ajoutons qu’il est supporté par des mots occultés, autant de gnomes invisibles qui s’appliquent à rompre, depuis l’inconscient, la cohérence des enchaînements. Enfin, il est source de répétitions indéfinies, ne donnant le plus souvent même pas prise à la rationalisation.⁹⁵

Hania similarly experiences Zoulikha’s phantom periodically ‘[u]ne fois tous les six mois; quelquefois une seule fois par an’.⁹⁶ The language with which it marks its return is, moreover, suggestive of Abraham and Torok’s transgenerational phantom:

Ainsi une parole menue, basse, envahit la fille aînée de Zoulikha [...]. [...]. Il y a dix ans tout juste, germa en elle cette parole ininterrompue qui la vide, qui, parfois, la barbouille, mais en dedans, comme un flux de glaire qui s’écoulerait sans perte, mais extérieur...⁹⁷

Again Djébar stresses the gap in knowledge as the phantomogenic words released from within Hania’s unconscious cannot be deciphered. Instead, suggests Hania, the words appear as a form of ancient Berber or Libyan that elude comprehension:

La Voix réaffleure en moi, marmonnement incompréhensible, d’une langue d’avant, un berbère inconnu d’avant le berbère, un libyque évaporé d’il y a deux mille ans, gargouillis dans les creux de mon corps.⁹⁸

The symbolic capitalization of *Voix* gives prominence to the notion of a phantom source of speech in Hania and the term corresponds to Zoulikha’s own repeated reference to her ‘voix’ in her final ghostly monologue.⁹⁹

⁹³ Ibid., p. 427.

⁹⁴ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 51.

⁹⁵ Abraham and Torok, p. 431.

⁹⁶ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, pp. 63-64.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 63-64.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 89.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 221, 227.

The phantom's return marks both the transmission of, and the preservation of, 'un *secret intrapsychique*' that passes from the parent's unconscious to that of the child.¹⁰⁰ In *La Femme sans sépulture* both Hania and Mina are traumatized by the phantom's return and Mina is explicitly described as 'une jeune femme qu'un secret tourmente'.¹⁰¹ Zoulikha's concealed secret might well be her desire for Costa, a French officer, although it is also likely that the shameful 'secret'—that which remains unspeakable—is her torture and probable rape at the hands of the French soldiers who brutally murder her. Indeed, the systematic rape and torture of Algerian women was, for many years, repressed in France, and remains to this day a taboo subject.¹⁰² Zoulikha's haunting soliloquies, which focus on the final moments of her life in which she is captured and killed, certainly point to this conclusion.

Trauma and 'Acting Out'

The phantom's return is described by Abraham and Torok as inducing a sleep-like state, in which a particularly traumatic scene is melancholically acted out as a recurrent phantasmagoria:

[Le fantôme] induit, au moment de la hantise, un état semblable au sommeil, au cours duquel la scène de la peur sera jouée selon les lois du rêve (visualisation agie, déguisement, etc.). Le sommeil vigile contrefait ici l'acte et l'effet du refoulement ou de l'escamotage parental.¹⁰³

Hania experiences her mother's return during periods of strange sleep-like 'insomnie' and Zoulikha's monologues can be seen to 'stage' the shameful secret that is now buried within her daughter's psyche.¹⁰⁴ By figuring Zoulikha's return as four dramatic monologues or

¹⁰⁰ Abraham and Torok, p. 267.

¹⁰¹ Djebbar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 101.

¹⁰² Andrea L. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 5.

¹⁰³ Abraham and Torok, p. 440.

¹⁰⁴ Djebbar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 63.

‘soliloque[s]’, Djebbar thus points to the acting out or staging of the phantom’s unconscious secret.¹⁰⁵

This engagement with the leitmotif of the theatre is ubiquitous throughout *La Femme sans sépulture* and moves beyond the scope of Abraham and Torok’s theory of the transgenerational phantom. Indeed, if psychoanalysis encourages us to exorcise our ghosts, Djebbar is instead deeply concerned with the effects of melancholia upon the spectral figure.¹⁰⁶ In contrast to Freud, whom Anne Anlin Cheng condemns for overlooking ‘what happens to the object [and] its potential for subjectivity’, *La Femme sans sépulture* seeks an ethical mode of relating to the ghost.¹⁰⁷ Djebbar thus investigates the concept of agency and probes the limits of melancholic haunting by grounding Zoulikha’s narrative within a theatrical framework. In doing so she gestures towards an ever-developing body of theory on melancholic haunting that employs the tropes of the theatre in order to articulate the relationship between haunted subject and ghostly object.¹⁰⁸ For Bianca Del Villano, for instance, ‘the ghost *dramatises* the presence of an absence’,¹⁰⁹ making visible that which, in Derrida’s terms, ‘n’appartient plus au temps, si l’on entend sous ce nom l’enchaînement des présents modalisés (présent passé, présent actuel: “maintenant”, present futur)’.¹¹⁰ In this way, the figure of the ghost renders

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁰⁶ Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 9.

¹⁰⁷ Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Derrida’s *Spectres de Marx*, a major source of much contemporary theory on haunting, invokes Hamlet’s well-known phrase ‘The time is out of joint’ as one of its maxims (p. 20). Meanwhile in *L’Écorce et le noyau* Abraham and Torok employ that same Shakespearean drama to elucidate their theory of the phantom, even going so far as to write ‘Le fantôme d’Hamlet ou le VIe acte’, a postscript that ‘solves’ the riddle at the heart of Shakespeare’s tragedy (pp. 447-74). Freud did refer to Hamlet as early as 1917 in his essay ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ but the recent correlation between haunting and the theatrical is less a homage to Freudian theory than it is an exploration of the spatial and temporal dynamics of the phantom (p. 246).

¹⁰⁹ Bianca Del Villano, *Ghostly Alterities: Spectrality and Contemporary Literatures in English* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag), p. 2 (my emphasis).

¹¹⁰ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, p. 17.

explicit not only time's 'non-contemporanéité' with itself',¹¹¹ but also the way in which the image is always belated and other to itself.¹¹² Cheng, furthermore, views 'the melancholic ego as formed and fortified by a spectral drama' that gives expression to the repetitive concealment and reappearance of the lost object.¹¹³ The ambivalent *fort/da*, back and forth dialectic of melancholia—in which the lost object is repeatedly banished from the ego and then subsequently desired again in order 'to maintain the [subject's] existing libido position against the onslaught'—thus plays out in the ambiguous and dramatic relationship between the haunted subject and the ghost.¹¹⁴ It is, then, perhaps no coincidence that Spivak should invoke the highly visual and theatrical image of the 'ghost dance' to describe the phantasmatic relationship between the self and ancestral other,¹¹⁵ or that Homi Bhabha should exploit the language of the theatre to expose the way in which the postcolonial time-lag 'projects' the past, revealing the way in which modernity—its temporality, its dialectical, progressive moment—is 'staged'.¹¹⁶ Indeed, theatre, like haunting, is very much concerned with the vicissitudes of (not) seeing and (not) being seen and thus it operates as a productive theoretical locus around which to engage with the politics of representation.

La Femme sans sépulture enacts its own spectral drama as Zoulikha returns belatedly to haunt the present. Djébar builds upon the structure and language of Greco-Roman theatre in order to articulate the forgotten history of Zoulikha, a narratological device that has been

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 16.

¹¹² See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York; London: Routledge, 1994), p. 51. Bhabha describes the image as a spectral formation that 'makes *present* something which is *absent*—and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition'. For Bhabha, the very notion of the image itself is fraught with ambivalence, enacting the immediacy of a presence at the self-same moment it effaces itself. Theatre, as a primarily visual medium, engages with this ambivalence through its repetitive subversion of 'real time' and its heightened exploitation of the politics of the visual.

¹¹³ Cheng, p. 10.

¹¹⁴ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 256.

¹¹⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Ghostwriting', *Diacritics*, 25.2 (1995), 65-84 (p. 70).

¹¹⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 254.

alluded to by several of Djébar's critics.¹¹⁷ Djébar's recourse to the spectacle of theatre is rendered explicit by her reference to Zoulikha as 'une figure de tragédie'.¹¹⁸ Indeed, she is a spectralized protagonist who acts out her story before the numerous spectators within (and beyond) the text: 'Nous cherchons la scène, nous nous avançons irrésistiblement comme des acteurs de théâtre [...] devant le vide des spectateurs'.¹¹⁹ Indeed, Zoulikha is even afforded her own dramatic monologue or 'soliloque'.¹²⁰ The novel is composed of a variety of latent *scènes* which lead, inevitably, to the ultimate *scène à faire* in which Zoulikha is captured by the French army and transported via helicopter shortly before her death and probable rape:¹²¹

Jusqu'à la scène finale, de tragédie: arrêtée, Zoulikha sort de la forêt, sous la garde de soldats. [...]. Quelques vieux paysans pleurent tandis que harkis et officiers français l'entraînent vers l'hélicoptère. Personne ne la reverra vivante.¹²²

This dramatic moment, which Sylvie Blum-Reid rightly contends is 'la scène centrale de l'histoire', is anticipated, rehearsed even, throughout the novel by Zoulikha and several other female characters.¹²³ The scene is acted out within what Zoulikha terms 'notre courette', itself evocative of the historical roman amphitheatre in Césarée.¹²⁴ Djébar's use of the present tense suggests that the scene is re-enacted, albeit belatedly, as if it were in fact taking place in the present; in this respect the repetition of the traumatic moment corresponds to the notion of trauma as an event which plays out again in real time. Djébar's engagement with the theatrical can thus be read as an imaginative illustration of the way in which trauma is melancholically acted out. If, according to Dominick LaCapra, in 'acting-out one has a mimetic relation to the

¹¹⁷ Sylvie Blum-Reid, 'Voyage dans le passé/présent de *La Femme sans sépulture* d'Assia Djébar', in *Assia Djébar*, ed. by Najib Redouane et Yvette Bénayoun-Szmidt (Paris: Harmattan, 2008), pp. 285-91 (p. 286); Donadey, 'Introjection and Incorporation', p. 85; Aas-Rouxparis, p. 97.

¹¹⁸ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 242.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 33.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹²³ Blum-Reid, p. 287.

¹²⁴ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 71.

past which is regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription',¹²⁵ this is an apt description of Zoulikha, who is compelled to 'joue[r] quelque répétition de spectacle antique pour la cité assoupie' ad infinitum.¹²⁶

This haunting spectacle reaches its climax during Zoulikha's final monologue where it is reenacted or staged once again. The scene is permeated by the same 'lumière blanche' that illuminates Zoulikha's spectre throughout the novel:¹²⁷ 'ce qui me sauta au visage, aux yeux, à tout mon corps épuisé [...] ce fut la lumière!'.¹²⁸ As Jane Hiddleston articulates, 'In this passage, excessive light is associated not only with over-exposure but with falsity and performance, like powerful stage lamps that shine upon actors in order to make them hyper-real'.¹²⁹ By gesturing to the 'liberté romanesque' at stake in the production or staging of Zoulikha's return, Djébar thus reminds us of the vicissitudes of representing or speaking on behalf of the other.¹³⁰ Her timely intervention is a stark reminder that artists and theorists must be critically aware of the way in which she or he might conjure the spectre for aesthetic purposes. Thus while Spivak may refer to Djébar as an archetypal subalternist,¹³¹ Djébar perhaps cannot help but be implicated in the processes of appropriation outlined by Spivak in her infamous 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'.¹³² As Hiddleston suggests in her analysis of *La*

Femme sans sépulture:

The main narrator [...] sets out to resuscitate [Zoulikha's] ghost, but also perhaps speaks in her place and can never escape the risk of aestheticising her experiences or reappropriating them for her own literary ends.¹³³

¹²⁵ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 45.

¹²⁶ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 71.

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 68, 225.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

¹²⁹ Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar*, p. 164.

¹³⁰ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 11.

¹³¹ Spivak, 'Ghostwriting', p. 79.

¹³² Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', pp. 66-111.

¹³³ Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar*, p. 167.

Yet if Djébar is in danger of appropriating Zoulikha, the text is important precisely because it engages in a form of auto-critique. Djébar may resurrect Zoulikha, but she does so tentatively, meditating on the ethical implications of such a process.

In a discussion of *La Femme sans sépulture*, Michael O'Riley persuasively argues that in returning to the scene of violence, Djébar points to the way in which the spectral figure is always at risk of being appropriated for political or ideological means. For O'Riley, the haunting return of martyr figures, particularly in the context of postcolonial Algeria, can fuel victimization and perpetuate the putative divide between East and West because it sustains the Manichean binary of colonial relations.¹³⁴ In particular, he expresses concern regarding the appropriation of historical figures, arguing that:

even the most well-meaning attempts to return to colonial history as a haunting specter for the contemporary condition are often vitiated by impulses of appropriation similar to the impulse to appropriate territory.¹³⁵

As O'Riley's and Hiddleston's remarks suggest, even people with the most ethical of intentions are at risk of appropriating the past for their own ends. Djébar's anxieties surrounding Zoulikha's resurrection permeate *La Femme sans sépulture*, but are fully developed in the protagonist's final monologue, which exploits the leitmotif of the theatre to full effect. In this scene Zoulikha describes the way in which she has little control over the repetitive 'staging' of her body-object:¹³⁶

c'est comme si, de cette ultime exposition devant tous (j'allais dire, cette crucifixion sans croix!), je n'avais pas bougé du cœur du douar, des décennies: une nuit entière, toutes les nuits. C'est comme si j'avais pourri au même endroit [...] sous un soleil immuable, puis dans le corridor de ses nuits d'insomnie!...¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Michael F. O'Riley, *Postcolonial Haunting and Victimization: Assia Djébar's New Novels* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 19.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹³⁷ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, pp. 223-24.

Importantly, it is not so much the original trauma that torments Zoulikha, but the way in which she is hauntingly compelled to re-enact it as an exhibition every night. Her allusion to the event as a ‘crucifixion sans croix’ intimates that she is limited by the repetitive invocation of this final scene and also, perhaps, by the latent desires of those who, some years after her death, wish to remember or stage her memory according to their own agenda. It is precisely Djébar’s recourse to the theatrical that demonstrates how the recuperative and melancholic ‘postcolonial gaze’ of certain individuals is in constant danger of condemning Zoulikha to hauntingly act out the moment of trauma *ad infinitum*.

Indeed, for O’Riley, in returning to the scene of colonialism and attempting to recover lost or occluded pasts, the subject is in danger of enacting a colonial gesture of appropriation.¹³⁸ Building upon this insight, I would like to suggest that one of the reasons behind this tendency to appropriate the ghosts of memory lies in the recent turn to melancholia. My aim is not to suggest that theorists of melancholia or loss are guilty of such appropriative gestures, but instead to propose that the structure of melancholia means, perhaps, that scholars or artists who engage with this concept are inadvertently in danger of appropriating the lost object they seek to rehabilitate.

In melancholia the loss is so painful that the grieving subject cannot bear to renounce the lost object. Like Hania and Mina, rather than accede to loss, the subject instead incorporates the lost object within his or her own ego, subsequently identifying with it. Freud likens the incorporation of the object to a form of cannibalism, asserting that the ego may assimilate it and ‘in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development [...] [will] do so by devouring it’.¹³⁹ Notably, this form of ingestion is not an attempt to

¹³⁸ O’Riley, *Postcolonial Haunting*, p. 58.

¹³⁹ Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, pp. 249-50.

preserve the other *as other* but, as Abraham and Torok suggest, a desperate attempt to preserve the self: incorporation occurs ‘Devant l’imminence de perdre son soutien interne, le noyau de son être’.¹⁴⁰ Following on from Freud’s assertion that melancholia arises out of the ego’s narcissistic identification with the other, it stands that the loss of the object results in a loss of ego. As Eric Santner explains it, a ‘melancholic response to loss [...] ensues when the object was loved not as separate and distinct from oneself, but rather as a mirror of one’s own sense of self and power’.¹⁴¹ The incorporation of the object is thus a desperate attempt to foreclose the impending loss of ego that threatens the subject’s very being.

Melancholia, at its most basic level, is thus the term given to a structure of desire that aims to appropriate an object in order to validate and perpetuate the self. In this respect, then, it has certain parallels with Frantz Fanon’s Hegelian-inspired depiction of colonial desire, in which the colonizer desires, or identifies with, the colonized other only insofar as the latter can authenticate the master’s self; by returning the colonizer’s gaze the colonized object affirms what Hegel calls the master’s being for others.¹⁴² Admittedly, the object in melancholia often represents an ego-ideal, whereas the colonized other cannot be said to represent the same for the colonizer, and yet both ‘objects’ ostensibly share the same function: to preserve, at all costs, the subject’s sense of self. Thus colonial relations and melancholia are structured by similar processes of desire, identification, and narcissism. In a discussion of colonial desire in his preface to the English version of Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Bhabha suggests:

¹⁴⁰ Abraham and Torok, p. 273.

¹⁴¹ Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 2.

¹⁴² Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952), p. 88.

Such binary, two-part, identities function in a kind of narcissistic reflection of the One in the Other which is confronted in the language of desire by the psychoanalytic process of identification.¹⁴³

Bhabha employs a psychoanalytical framework to give expression to the mechanism of colonial desire, and the processes he accentuates—including narcissism and identification—are key elements of melancholia. Colonial desire is, of course, fraught with ambivalence, not least in the sense that the colonizer both desires and rejects the colonized other, who can never be fully assimilated; the French Algerian, no matter how much he can imitate his master, will always be viewed as a marker of alterity. Yet this process of ambivalent desire and repulsion that underpins the colonial system is, as I have already discussed, a major component of melancholia; it is precisely this repetitive appropriation/repulsion mechanism that constitutes melancholia's ambivalence.

As is well known, Bhabha's psychological analysis of colonial relations stems from Fanon's seminal insights in *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*. In a reading of Fanon in *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha articulates desire in terms of a form of appropriation of the other, arguing that, 'It is always in relation to the place of the Other that colonial desire is articulated: the phantasmic space of possession'.¹⁴⁴ Fanon figures desire as a phantasmatic attempt at appropriation that always, inevitably, fails to fully possess its object. Employing a strikingly similar lexicon in his discussion of melancholia, Giorgio Agamben figures melancholia as a process sustained by desire and its repetitive courting of the phantasm, maintaining that:¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Homi K. Bhabha, 'Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition', in *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto, 2008), pp. xxi-xxxvii, (p. xxix).

¹⁴⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 44.

¹⁴⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 25.

the strategy of melancholy opens a space for the existence of the unreal and marks out a scene in which the ego may enter into relation with it and *attempt an appropriation such as no other possession could rival and no loss possibly threaten*.¹⁴⁶

In a more recent discussion of melancholia in light of race-relations in the United States, Cheng reads the racialized other as the foreign body at the heart of the American nation, similarly contending that melancholia enacts ‘*a form of possession more intimate than any material relationship could produce*’.¹⁴⁷

In *La Femme sans sépulture* Zoulikha signals the ambivalent, cannibalistic traits of colonial desire when, in her second monologue, she remembers her interrogation by the French officer Costa: ‘il tendait autour de moi sa toile d’araignée invisible, bien visible—moi, sa proie’.¹⁴⁸ She resists his attempts at possession, however, proclaiming, ‘Non, je ne serais pas sa proie immobilisée, non!’.¹⁴⁹ While in life Zoulikha may succeed in eschewing the position of immobilized victim and thwarting the aggressive impulses of colonial desire, however, it is in death that she risks becoming ensnared by those who seek to melancholically recover or appropriate her past. Zoulikha is thus in danger of becoming, in Del Villano’s words, an emblematic ‘ghost of melancholy, entrapped [...] by the subject’.¹⁵⁰ In Zoulikha’s case, the subject is, perhaps, the postcolonial ‘spectateurs’ who engage her in a perpetual process of re-enactment.¹⁵¹

The similarities between the appropriating impulses of colonial desire and those of melancholia can be explored through the juxtaposition of Fanon’s staging of colonial relations in *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* with Zoulikha’s final monologue. Like Djébar in *La Femme sans sépulture*, Fanon exploits theatrical tropes in order to address the politics of the visual

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 20 (my emphasis).

¹⁴⁷ Cheng, p. 9 (my emphasis).

¹⁴⁸ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 133.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁵⁰ Del Villano, p. 92.

¹⁵¹ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 136.

and to probe the way in which the racialized gaze immobilizes and dehumanizes the colonized subject. Critics have commented upon the inherent theatricality of Fanon's theory,¹⁵² and Bhabha in particular celebrates 'the remarkable staging' of 'Fanon's phenomenological performance,'¹⁵³ referring specifically to the 'primal scenes' of *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*,¹⁵⁴ in which Fanon's 'agonizing performance of self-images' plays out.¹⁵⁵ These scenes point to the artificial, staged nature of colonial subject-object relations, described by Bhabha, following Fanon, as racialized 'dramas' that are 'enacted *every day* in colonized societies'.¹⁵⁶ By juxtaposing the racial drama of Fanon's seminal text with the 'psychical drama' of postcolonial melancholia in Djébar's novel, my intention is not to posit them as interchangeable psychological processes.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, the aims of theorists attempting to melancholically recover forgotten pasts are certainly not comparable with the objectives of colonialists. Instead, I wish to suggest that the structures of colonial desire and melancholia are such that they both have appropriation and ambivalence as their core mechanisms. As a result, perhaps, advocates of melancholia are inadvertently at risk of 'fixing' the subject-cum-object in a haunting moment of return that, rather than proffering agency, suspends the ghost in a liminal, transhistorical space.

One of the most well-known of Fanon's 'primal scenes' occurs in the section 'L'expérience vécue du Noir' in which he describes being surrounded by a group of white

¹⁵² See Keithley Philmore Woolward, 'Towards a Performative Theory of Liberation: Theatre, Theatricality and "Play" in the Work of Frantz Fanon' (unpublished doctoral thesis, New York University, 2008); Timothy Murray, *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime: the Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

¹⁵³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 236.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.42.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p 76.

¹⁵⁷ Cheng, p. 9.

spectators.¹⁵⁸ Fanon articulates the ontologically debilitating experience of perceiving himself as the object of a racist gaze. This fracturing objectification of the self is experienced not simply as an ontological rupture, but a corporeal one, in which he acts out the somatic manifestations of racial trauma:

Ce jour-là, désorienté, incapable d'être dehors avec l'autre, le Blanc, qui, impitoyable, m'emprisonnait, je me portai loin de mon être-là, très loin, me constituant objet. Qu'était-ce pour moi, sinon un décollement, un arrachement, une hémorragie qui caillait du sang noir sur tout mon corps?¹⁵⁹

Fanon internalizes the ambivalent structures of colonial desire and objectifies himself, depicting the scene in terms of a violent and racialized bodily haemorrhage that ultimately disfigures him, making him other to himself. His body expulses its 'black blood' and thus its objectification is experienced as a figurative death, one which plays out repeatedly in everyday situations.

In her final monologue Zoulikha is also encircled by a group of 'spectateurs' and, returning to the moment of torture, she distances herself from her own body, which is objectified simply as 'un corps':¹⁶⁰

Torture ou volupté, ainsi réduite soudain à rien, un corps—peau jetée en dépouille, à même le sol gras—, la mémoire des derniers instants malaxe tout monstrueusement: torture ou volupté, mon corps—peut-être parce que corps de femme et ayant enfanté tant de fois—se met à ouvrir ses plaies, ses issues, à déverser son flux, en somme il s'exhale, s'émiette, se vide sans pour autant s'épuiser!¹⁶¹

In a grotesque parody of childbirth, the gendered body is expelled, enacting its own death or negation. In its reference to a violent haemorrhage, it is evocative of Fanon's racial drama cited above. For Fanon, 'La connaissance du corps est une activité uniquement négatrice.

¹⁵⁸ While, for clarity's sake, I refer to Frantz Fanon as the subject-object, this is not to suggest that the persona of *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* is interchangeable with Fanon himself.

¹⁵⁹ Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 91.

¹⁶⁰ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 218.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

C'est une connaissance en troisième personne'.¹⁶² He experiences his body as a distorted, separate entity that marks its own figurative death: 'Mon corps me revenait étalé, disjoint, rétamé, tout endeuillé dans ce jour blanc d'hiver'.¹⁶³ Zoulikha experiences a similar dislocation between body and mind which the following citation, devoid as it is of any subjective 'I', succinctly demonstrates: 'De la longue durée de la torture et des sévices, ne te dire que le noir qui m'enveloppait'.¹⁶⁴ It must be pointed out, of course, that while Fanon's 'death' is a figurative one, Zoulikha's death is 'real' and therefore the lack of any *je* within this sentence underscores the way in which acts of torture dehumanize individuals, making of them immobilized victims. At the same time, however, it also demonstrates how, like Fanon, Zoulikha has little control over the production, or staging, of her body. The narratological devices employed by Djébar, including use of the present tense and her exploitation of theatrical tropes, invite the final dramatic monologue to be read as a meditation on the effects of what O'Riley might term 'staging the spectre'.¹⁶⁵ Zoulikha tellingly describes the performance as a 'mise en scène' in which her body becomes a spectacle that performs before the crowd:¹⁶⁶ she refers to it objectively as 'un cadavre exposé',¹⁶⁷ alluding also to '[sa] mort exposée'.¹⁶⁸

Rather than transcend the scene of colonial violence, Zoulikha must instead repeatedly relive it, participating against her will in the staging of her own body. The repetitive invocation of her violent death risks immobilizing her within a state of perpetual victimhood for, as Joshua Cole argues, colonial violence 'creates a specific space in which the violent

¹⁶² Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 89.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁶⁴ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 217.

¹⁶⁵ O'Riley, *Postcolonial Haunting*, p. 67.

¹⁶⁶ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 219.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

relationship can be *reenacted* and exploited as a kind of existential condition'.¹⁶⁹ It is, suggests Cole, precisely the perpetuation of such relationships that maintains the colonial enterprise.¹⁷⁰ By returning to the scene of Zoulikha's torture, and by figuring 'cette scène immobilisée' as merely one of many possible re-enactments, Djébar thus gestures to the way in which certain forms of melancholic recovery, including her own, are at risk of curtailing the spectre within a limiting structure of violence.¹⁷¹ If Djébar self-consciously implicates herself in the melancholic staging of Zoulikha's body, the reader is also implicated in the *mise en scène*. By framing the narrative scene within a visual 'tableau de peinture', Zoulikha connotes that the reader is unwittingly involved in the production of her body: 'cet écartèlement, ce tableau de peinture à vif caricaturé [...] liait bizarrement bourreaux et hommes victimes ou même témoins...'.¹⁷² This citation points to the imaginative processes involved in invoking the ghosts of history, but it also underscores the ethical complexities involved in acts of witnessing and testimony, recalling Avital Ronell's stark caveat that, 'Seeing *itself* [...] suffices to make the subject responsible'.¹⁷³

Perhaps by attempting to establish an ethical relationship with the ghosts of the past we cannot but ensnare them in a process of perpetual return, rendering them immobilized victims rather than victors. Just as Fanon describes being fixed in position by the colonial gaze that both desires and repels him, there are several references throughout the text to Zoulikha's suspended condition:¹⁷⁴ 'Zoulikha [...] est restée comme suspendue dans l'espace

¹⁶⁹ Joshua Cole, 'Intimate Acts and Unspeakable Relations: Remembering Torture and the War for Algerian Independence', in *Memory, Empire and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French Colonialism*, ed. by Alec G. Hargreaves (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 125-41 (p. 131) (my emphasis).

¹⁷⁰ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 131.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁷³ Avital Ronell, *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), p. 305.

¹⁷⁴ Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 93.

de la cité ancienne!'.¹⁷⁵ Her interstitial position is, as I have already intimated, mirrored by the text itself which, suggests Donadey, 'remains *en suspens*'.¹⁷⁶ Yet rather than attribute this narratological stasis to the movement between mourning and melancholia, it might well be the result of melancholia, which ensnares the object in a perpetual mode of repetition (*fort/da*) as the subject repeatedly repulses and desires the object. In melancholia, argues Cheng, the other is placed in a 'suspended condition', neither properly subject or object, here or there.¹⁷⁷ Correspondingly, the final scene is described as being permeated by 'un silence d'attente, de théâtre, de tragédie éventée en plein midi',¹⁷⁸ in which it appears 'Comme s'il n'y avait plus jamais, pour moi, de nuit: le temps, l'espace [...] tout n'était que lumière blanche—d'un blanc aveuglant de midi'.¹⁷⁹ The melancholic invocation of Zoulikha's tragic death 'toutes les nuits' leaves her suspended in a liminal space outside of time, waiting, it would seem, for some form of redemption or resolution:¹⁸⁰ 'mon corps reste dans sa lumière à lui, et ma voix, suspendue en attente de toi, ô Mina',¹⁸¹ claims Zoulikha, before terminating her final monologue with the words, 'je t'attends'.¹⁸²

Zoulikha's suspended condition underscores the ethical dilemmas that arise as a result of resurrecting the spectre. On the one hand, Djebbar is careful to ensure that her textual remembering of Zoulikha does not complete a process of introjection that might lead to amnesia, and yet the novel is also critical of the repetitive, melancholic invocation of the

¹⁷⁵ Djebbar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁶ Donadey, 'Introjection and Incorporation', p. 88. Donadey's notion that this suspended condition arises out of a to and fro movement from mourning to melancholia echoes LaCapra's view. In a discussion of mourning practices in 'Trauma, Absence, Loss', he contends that, 'There is at times a tendency in certain contemporary approaches [...] to restrict possibilities to two extremes between which one may oscillate or be suspended' (p. 717).

¹⁷⁷ Cheng, p. xi.

¹⁷⁸ Djebbar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, p. 225.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 234.

spectre. Just as this on-going cycle of return immobilizes Zoulikha, it also affects Hania and Mina, whose unconscious ties to the phantom of the crypt prevent them from working through their loss in a conscious manner. Like Zoulikha, they remain suspended and unable to proceed with their own lives. In gesturing to the palliative effects of speech, Djébar appears to underscore the need to inaugurate a mode of working upon the past that moves beyond the binary of mourning and melancholia that continues to dominate academic theory.¹⁸³ Yet if *La Femme sans sépulture* traces the vicissitudes of relating to the ghosts of memory, Djébar seems unsure of how best to proceed with the remembering of the spectral figure. For now then, ‘Zoulikha habite encore le cœur de la cité antique’,¹⁸⁴ melancholically waiting to join, perhaps, ‘le royaume des morts’.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Tammy Clewell, ‘Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud’s Psychoanalysis of Loss’, *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 52.1 (2004), 43-67 (p. 48).

¹⁸⁴ Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture*, pp. 235-36.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

 CHAPTER TWO

Melancholic Victimhood in Boualem Sansal's *Le Village de l'Allemand: ou Le Journal des frères Schiller* (2008)

Whether it characterizes individuals, families, social groups, or entire nations, silence and its varied forms—the untold or unsayable secret, the feeling unfelt, the pain denied, the unspeakable and concealed shame of families, the cover-up of political crimes, the collective disregard for painful historical realities—may disrupt our lives.

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In many ways Boualem Sansal's recent novel *Le Village de l'Allemand: ou Le Journal des frères Schiller* builds upon the issues explored in Assia Djébar's *La Femme sans sépulture*.

Structured as a series of interconnecting journal entries by two Algerian-German brothers living in Paris, the text analyses the latent effects of transgenerational trauma on Rachel and Malrich Schiller, the sons of a Holocaust perpetrator. As the text shifts across the spatio-temporal landscapes of Europe and North Africa to reveal the often contentious intersections between Nazism and contemporary Islamism, Rachel and Malrich employ the confessional mode to address a series of interconnected losses. First they are faced with the murder of their parents, Hans and Aïcha Schiller, in a frenzied Islamist massacre in the Algerian

¹ Nicolas T. Rand, 'Introduction: Renewals of Psychoanalysis', in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press), pp. 1-22 (p. 21).

village of Ain Deb during the civil war of the 1990s, before unmasking the devastating fact that their German father was an SS officer in Poland. Hans Schiller's interminable silence about his past, and his concomitant refusal to acknowledge his role in the extermination of millions of innocent victims, affects the brothers' ability to mourn his death. In this sense, their situation reflects the struggles faced by many children of the Holocaust's so-called 'second generation', who unconsciously became embroiled in their parents' past.² Yet, unlike the descendants of the victims of the Holocaust, Rachel and Malrich must come to terms with the loss of a perpetrator.

Le Village de l'Allemand thus engages with the ethics of mourning and, in doing so, it problematizes the widespread theorization of the ghost as an oppressed, victimized, or effaced other. Indeed the spectralized revenant is frequently invested with an ethical authenticity that is rarely called into question, stemming, it would seem, out of another largely uncontested assumption: that the ghost is necessarily a victim. Contemporary discourse which theorizes 'loss' as an abstract yet knowable object of inquiry inadvertently assumes a binary approach in which those who lose are almost always construed as victims, and in which the one who was lost is always already a victim. Recent theories that posit melancholia as the most appropriate response to loss inevitably create a framework in which loss becomes inextricable from victimhood. The lost-object-cum-victim is thus frequently construed as a subjugated, benign presence whose task it is to articulate loss in the name of justice.

In a recent analysis of the rhetoric of victimhood in late twentieth-century Europe, Fatima Naqvi contends that:

² Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: a Meditation on the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (London: Vintage, 2005), p. xii.

Victim status, rather than being shunned per se, appears as a means to create a tenuous affiliation within a radically atomized society [...]. It gains a particular foothold—as a popular discourse pervading all kinds of cultural manifestations in Western Europe—in the period after 1968.³

Victimhood has become such a pervasive trope in recent years, argues Naqvi, that Western society is today synonymous with a ‘victim society’.⁴ The following excerpt from Jacques Derrida’s *Spectres de Marx*, for instance, underscores the prevalence of the victim category to contemporary theories of haunting:

Aucune justice [...] ne paraît possible ou pensable sans le principe de quelque *responsabilité*, au-delà de tout *présent vivant*, dans ce qui disjointe le présent vivant, devant les fantômes de ceux qui ne sont pas encore nés ou qui sont déjà morts, victimes ou non des guerres, des violences politiques ou autres, des exterminations nationalistes, racistes, colonialistes, sexistes ou autres, des oppressions de l’impérialisme capitaliste ou de toutes les formes du totalitarisme.⁵

That the living should open themselves up to the dead in the name of justice is irrefutable. Yet, the ethical intent of the passage notwithstanding, Derrida’s long catalogue of victims risks detracting from the specificity of each historical trauma. The ubiquitous spectral victim comes to stand in as a theoretical concept for all victims to the extent that, as Naqvi acknowledges, ‘Certain victims, such as the Jewish victims under Nazism, risk becoming some victims among many’.⁶ As categories of victimhood become increasingly conflated, this encourages a kind of universal or existential victimhood that prevents more nuanced analyses of loss and trauma that would take account of the singularity of a given socio-historical milieu. To critique the manner in which victim subject-positions risk shading into one another is not, however, to advocate a hierarchical counter-model in which the Holocaust remains beyond critique, but to suggest that a ‘one size fits all’ methodology—

³ Fatima Naqvi, *The Literary and Cultural Rhetoric of Victimhood: Western Europe 1970-2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 3-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l’état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), pp. 15-16.

⁶ Naqvi, p. 7.

whether it be melancholia or haunting—is inadequate for an era in which melancholic victimhood has emerged as a dominant paradigm.

In *Le Village de l'Allemand* Sansal probes the conflation of different victim subject-positions while also problematizing the current symbiotic relationship between victim and haunting revenant. As Robert Jay Lifton asks in his preface to the Mitscherlich's critique of postwar Germany, what if it emerges that the beloved lost object was involved in an evil act?⁷ How might Rachel and Malrich deal with the loss of a paradoxically much-loved war criminal guilty of some of the most heinous atrocities of the twentieth century? In contrast to recent theorizations of the lost object as a silenced or disenfranchised victim, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's theory of the transgenerational phantom provides a useful framework for reimagining the spectralized figure as a deceiver intent on concealing its past.⁸ Yet, just as Sansal's novel reveals the ethical ambiguities of melancholically safeguarding the oppressor, it also problematizes this further by portraying him as both a victim and a perpetrator simultaneously. Although his actions during the Holocaust overshadow the narrative, the text is also nuanced by the fact that Hans Schiller, together with his wife, is also a victim of a frenzied Islamist massacre during the Algerian civil war. The novel thus explores an important ethical dilemma: how does one mourn Hans Schiller the victim-cum-perpetrator? And what role does melancholia play in the remembrance or conflation of these multiple subject positions?

Melancholy Denial and the Economic Miracle

⁷ Robert Jay Lifton, 'Preface', in *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, trans. by Beverley R. Placzek (New York: Grove Press, 1975), pp. i-xiii. (p. i).

⁸ See Colin Davis, 'Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms', *French Studies*, 59 (2005), 373-79 (p. 374).

As in *La Femme sans sépulture*, Sansal's novel traces the discursive relationship between melancholia, trauma, and silence as they relate to the microcosm of the family and the wider socio-political sphere. If contemporary theory sometimes celebrates melancholia as a historicizing and ethical medium of exchange, Djébar's novel both engages and problematizes this view, giving Zoulikha a voice even as she questions her own authorial intentions. Sansal's narrative is more critical of melancholic haunting, however, and far from enabling the spectralized other to 'speak back' to the present, it points to the myriad ways in which melancholia is constituted by silence, denial, and repression.

As Rachel begins his journey throughout postwar Germany in a desperate bid to uncover his father's Nazi past, he is continually confronted with silence in its various forms, describing the country as 'infiniment lointain, irrémédiablement secret'.⁹ On a visit to his father's native town he hopes to unearth a relic of the Third Reich 'tourmenté par des démons d'avant le Christ', but instead encounters 'le nouveau monde, plein de brillance et de hauteurs': 'Uelzen est nickel, c'est beau, c'est chaud, c'est bon pour le touriste'.¹⁰ In its generic appeal and ability to regenerate itself as an unassuming, tourist-oriented town, Uelzen is testimony to the success of Germany's postwar economic miracle, which served as a means of obscuring the wounds of the past and impeding mourning.¹¹ The historical amnesia that characterized the fifties and sixties persists in the present, as Rachel discovers when questioning his father's German friend about the war:¹²

"Après la Wehrmacht, mon père a rejoint les SS et il s'est retrouvé dans les stalags, Dachau, Buchenwald, Auschwitz... Le saviez-vous?"

⁹ Boualem Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand: ou Le journal des frères Schiller* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), p. 67.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹¹ Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, trans. by Beverley R. Placzek (New York: Grove Press, 1975), p. 13.

¹² Erin McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), p. 4.

Il m'a longuement regardé, puis il a hoché la tête. C'était oui ou peut-être non. J'ai murmuré:
 "En-étiez-vous?"
 Silence.
 "Cela faisait-il partie du devoir?"
 Silence.
 "S'il vous plaît."
 Silence. Ponctué d'un geste d'énervement.¹³

By reiterating the term *silence*, the dialogue reveals the way in which silence now substitutes for language, concealing the horrors of a past that cannot, or will not, be articulated or introjected. Indeed, repression has been so effective that when pressed about details of the war, the old man replies, 'Ach, c'est loin, tout ça. Il ne reste rien, rien de rien'.¹⁴ This double negation of the past points to the complexities of memory discussed in the introduction, calling to mind as it does Butler's conception of the 'loss of loss'.¹⁵ Sansal's narrative then signals to current theoretical anxieties when Rachel contends that, 'il y a les silences, les pertes de mémoire, les mensonges [...]. Les victimes meurent toujours deux fois'.¹⁶ In contrast to the idea that mourning engenders the second, figurative death of the other, however, in *Le Village de l'Allemand* it is melancholia which is inextricably tied to silence and forgetting.

In order to comprehend the ways in which silence relates to melancholia in postwar Germany, it is germane to turn to the psychoanalytical reflections of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich. In *The Inability to Mourn*, their exemplary analysis of postwar Germany, they convincingly argue that the nation's capacity for mourning was thwarted by an involuntary defence mechanism that protected against mass narcissistic injury.¹⁷ Following on from Freud's hypothesis in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* that

¹³ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 76.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁵ Judith Butler, 'Afterword: After Loss, What Then?', in *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, ed. by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 467-73 (p. 467).

¹⁶ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 125.

¹⁷ Mitscherlich, p. 23.

groups are formed when each individual substitutes the same object for his or her ego-ideal,¹⁸ the Mitscherlichs propose that the German people identified with their Führer in a narcissistic way, not only as a man but as their collective ego-ideal.¹⁹ Given the sheer intensity with which the majority of the German people incorporated Hitler as an internal object, it follows that his death should have induced a state of mass melancholia, since narcissistic object-identification always gives rise to melancholia.²⁰ What occurred instead of melancholia, argue the Mitscherlichs, was the outright denial of loss in which the employment of ‘instinctive and *unconscious* self-protective forces of *forgetting*, [and] *denying*’ precluded what should have been an inevitable descent into melancholy.²¹

While they situate this denial outside the scope of melancholia, however, it is important to consider the way in which denial is a foundational component of melancholic identification.²² Melancholia arises out of a loss and involves a rejection of reality that is analogous with what the Mitscherlichs describe as the de-realization of the past.²³ Furthermore, the postwar nation’s reaction is identified as an unconscious one, in much the same way as melancholia is an unconscious response to loss.²⁴ Given these parallels it is clearly apposite to move beyond the arbitrary distinction between the denial of loss and melancholia, to consider them as symbiotic responses to trauma. This is certainly the position adopted by Paul Gilroy who builds upon the inferences in *The Inability to Mourn* to

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey, 18 (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 67-143 (p. 116).

¹⁹ Mitscherlich, p. 23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28; Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, in *On the History of the Psycho-analytic Movement: Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 243-58.

²¹ Mitscherlich, p. 15 (my emphasis).

²² See Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 9.

²³ Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, p. 244; Mitscherlich, p. 23.

²⁴ Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, p. 245.

suggest that Britain's 'inability to face, never mind actually mourn' its empire is a form of 'postimperial melancholia'.²⁵ David Kyuman Kim's definition of Freudian melancholia as 'a state in which there is a continual suspension of mourning' is thus a useful point of reference as it encompasses all forms of denial and repression that would impede processes of working through.²⁶

This suspension of mourning in postwar Germany has had severe consequences for the second generation. While the majority of research has tended to concentrate on the belated effects of the Holocaust upon the children of survivors, Erin McGlothlin points to the structural and psychological parallels between the experiences of those born to victims and perpetrators alike.²⁷ As is the case with the children of survivors, the descendants of Holocaust perpetrators are indelibly affected by their parents' experiences; unconsciously inheriting the first generation's melancholia, they are obliged to bear the guilt of their familial legacy.²⁸ McGlothlin suggests that the children of perpetrators experience this denial of the past as an almost biblical stain upon their souls, and certainly this is the case for Rachel who experiences the Holocaust as a foundational event for which he must atone.²⁹ Similarly grappling with the consequences of his father's interminable silence, Malrich exclaims: 'Je suis Malrich, fils de Hans Schiller le SS, coupable d'extermination, je porte en moi le plus grand drame du monde, j'en suis le dépositaire et j'ai honte, et j'ai peur, et je veux mourir!'.³⁰ Like Rachel, he internalizes the repression of his father's generation, which plays out as an epic, melancholic drama within his psyche. He thus becomes the site

²⁵ Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 90.

²⁶ David Kyuman Kim, *Melancholic Freedom: Agency and the Spirit of Politics* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 17.

²⁷ McGlothlin, pp. 9-10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁰ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, pp. 215-16.

of a transgenerational form of melancholia that is so severe it leads him to contemplate suicide.

As in *La Femme sans sépulture*, what is particularly distinct about this form of melancholia is that the ego is traumatized by an experience for which it has no referent: the ‘event that has marked the second generation [...] is inaccessible, yet the mark of that experience remains and, like the phantom pain, continues to haunt its bearer’.³¹ In ‘Father and Sons’ Michael Schneider examines the complex ways in which the melancholic denial of the first generation manifests itself in the group psychology of subsequent generations. Following on from the observations of the Mitscherlichs in *The Inability to Mourn*, Schneider contends that the ‘depressive disposition and the high incidence of suicide within the “second lost generation”’ is directly related to the second generation’s identification with:

the latent emotions of that generation, i.e. with the concealed, unspoken, un-“lived-out” and apocryphal side of their sense of life. In a sort of unconscious displacement, the post-war generation appropriated those feelings of melancholy, resignation, and depression which the older generation [...] denied itself, by repressing them.³²

Schneider’s suggestion that trauma and melancholia are transmitted through the generations because a past crime remains unacknowledged clearly has parallels with Abraham and Torok’s conceptualization of the phantom. Like Schneider, who describes the haunting return of the first generation’s latent emotions as a “‘Hamletesque” situation’ in which the ‘Nazi phantom-figures of [the] fathers’ return to the present, Abraham and Torok also exploit Shakespeare’s drama to explicate their theory.³³ Whereas McGlothlin and Schneider

³¹ McGlothlin, p. 10. For a discussion of transgenerational trauma in the offspring of perpetrators see also Gabriele Schwab, ‘Haunting Legacies: Trauma in Children of Perpetrators’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 7.2 (2004), 177-95.

³² Michael Schneider and Jamie Owen Daniel, ‘Fathers and Sons, Retrospectively: The Damaged Relationship Between Two Generations’, *New German Critique*, 31 (1984), 3-51 (p. 37).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

regard the haunting transmission of the past from parent to child as a largely involuntary process, Abraham and Torok view it as an active mode of haunting in which the returning phantom attempts to further conceal the original secret.³⁴ The figure of Hamlet is thus not haunted by his father per se, they contend, but by the shameful, phantomogenic secrets that he took with him to the grave.³⁵ In this respect, their theory provides a critical framework through which to comprehend the continuing impact of Hans Schiller's Nazi past upon Rachel who is, incidentally, married to Ophélie and described by Martin Mégevand as the 'cousin d'Hamlet'.³⁶

While all the dead may return, suggest Abraham and Torok, certain phantoms who, like Zoulikha, took unspeakable, shameful secrets to the grave with them are more predisposed to haunt than others.³⁷ In *Le Village de l'Allemand*, Hans Schiller is repeatedly critiqued by Rachel and Malrich for having concealed his past and this veil of secrecy persists in the present via Rachel's haunting phantasmagorias. His dream sequences take place in the Nazi death camps and thus at first glance they appear to reveal the secrets that Hans Schiller desperately tried to suppress. On closer inspection, however, it is evident that the haunting moment of return conceals much more than it reveals:

c'est tout le Mal depuis les origines qui [...] me parle sans cesse de ce qui fut, de ce que nous fîmes. Cette image me torture, le brouillard m'étouffe [...] une procession d'ombres... des hommes, des femmes, des enfants, innombrables, nus, décharnés, qui avancent en bon ordre sous le regard glacé d'un SS vers un immense brasier, qui... *au secours!*... je m'enfonce dans la fantasmagorie... J'appelle à l'aide... je cherche mon père... *Où est-tu, papa, que fais-tu?* Je veux le trouver, le réveiller... me réveiller... [...] *je ne sais pas pourquoi, mon père ne m'a rien dit...*³⁸

³⁴ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *L'Écorce et le noyau* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), p. 427.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

³⁶ Martin Mégevand, 'Le Village de l'Allemand: entretien avec Boualem Sansal', *Littérature*, 154 (2009), 108-17 (p. 108).

³⁷ Abraham and Torok, p. 426.

³⁸ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 114.

The employment of a disjunctive, stream-of-consciousness narrative demonstrates the way in which Rachel relives the past in much the same way as a victim of trauma would partially relive, or act out, a particularly distressing experience. The idea that he is tortured ‘sans cesse’ by discursive, spectral images points to the tendency of trauma to manifest itself repeatedly in dream sequences, flashbacks, and hallucinations.³⁹ This is not, of course, the Freudian return of the repressed, but the return of the father’s phantom. Just as Zoulikha’s phantom repeatedly secretes words that point to a gap in Hania’s knowledge, so Rachel is possessed by ‘le Mal’, a malign phantom which ‘[lui] parle sans cesse’. Through its periodic and compulsive return, argue Abraham and Torok, the phantom’s secreted words wreak havoc on coherence and logical progression, ultimately eluding rationalization.⁴⁰ Similarly, Rachel’s narrative lacks the fluidity of his regular journalistic prose; its disjointed structure and unanswered questions suggest that knowledge of the past eludes him. Rather than elucidating meaning, the ghostly smog chokes and muffles him, suppressing his ability to decode the contents of his dream. His desperate attempts to locate his father’s secret within the logic of the phantasmagoria fail precisely because the secret exists not simply at the level of the unconscious but, as in *La Femme sans sépulture*, as a lacuna within the unconscious. The structural gaps in the narrative, compounded by the incoherence of the passage as a whole, thus reflect the phantom’s capacity to secrete words that ‘désignent chez [l’enfant] non pas une source du dire mais une lacune dans le dicible’.⁴¹

In *Le Village de l’Allemand* Rachel’s phantasmagorias reveal silence to be a crucial component of melancholic haunting, in much the same way that Abraham and Torok’s

³⁹ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p.10.

⁴⁰ Abraham, and Torok, p. 431.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

phantom reportedly ‘poursuit dans le silence son œuvre de déliaison’.⁴² The following passage from Rachel’s dream sequence illustrates the way in which language gives way to a debilitating, ghostly silence that precludes comprehension: ‘un brouhaha fantomatique qui grossit, grossit, puis peu à peu s’éteint dans un silence lancinant... *mon Dieu, ce silence, comme il est étrange, comme il fait mal...*’.⁴³ He then concludes the scene with:

je suis écrasé par le silence, ce silence si effrayant, je ne distingue rien, le rêve, le cauchemar et la réalité sont l’un dans l’autre. [...]. Le silence a quelque chose de surnaturel... je l’entends, il sent le cramé, il colle à la peau.⁴⁴

The silence is invested with a peculiar spectrality that recalls the father’s phantom. Far from a passive silence, it operates with frightening, almost tangible resolve to prevent Rachel from decoding his dream via the normal faculties. In this way, haunting is seen to function symbiotically with silence, paradoxically perpetuating the first generation’s melancholic denial of the past.

Notably, despite Rachel’s desperate attempts to gain access to the truth of his father’s past, and in spite of his lucid condemnation of the way in which ‘les crimes de guerre enfouis dans le silence, l’oubli’, his ostensibly self-reflexive journal paradoxically reveals his own attempts to suppress his father’s history.⁴⁵ His narrative can therefore be seen to enact the secretive and unconscious pact between the transgenerational phantom and its subject: not only does the phantom seek to conceal the past, suggest Abraham and Torok, but the child unconsciously endeavours to do the same for fear of shaming the much revered parent.⁴⁶ Rachel’s journal would seem to counter this since it appears to disclose both personal and historical truths, yet Malrich repeatedly critiques Rachel for having concealed

⁴² Ibid., p. 431.

⁴³ Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand*, p. 116.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 117.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 125.

⁴⁶ Abraham and Torok, p. 432.

his father's Nazism from him and Ophélie in a gesture that replicates, and perpetuates, the elder's silence: 'Rachel ne lui disait rien, il ne me disait rien non plus, il gardait tout pour lui'.⁴⁷ Read in light of Abraham and Torok's productive yet overlooked theory of transgenerational haunting, it is evident that Hans Schiller's phantom appears not in order to clarify its relationship to the past, but to mask its exploits: the phantom is, in short, 'a deceiver and a liar'.⁴⁸

The Jekyll and Hyde Effect

While Rachel and Malrich suffer as a consequence of Hans Schiller's refusal to acknowledge his role in the Holocaust, their melancholic condition also arises out of their inability to come to terms with the loss of their father as an idealized love object. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud maintains that the Oedipal relationship between a father and his son is predicated on the child's narcissistic identification with the primal father, whom he takes as his ideal.⁴⁹ In this way, argues James Strachey in his introduction to Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia', identification with the father operates in a manner akin to melancholic ego attachment.⁵⁰ Melancholia, argues Freud, is always a narcissistic response to loss because the idealized love object is coveted (in life as in death) as a mirror of the self.⁵¹ The loss of the narcissistically loved ego-ideal threatens to engender a concomitant loss of ego, and in an attempt to deny such loss and to counter the inevitable injury to the self, the ego incorporates the lost object within its own psychic topography,

⁴⁷ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 49.

⁴⁸ Colin Davis, 'Charlotte Delbo's Ghosts', *French Studies*, 59.1 (2005), 9-15 (p. 9).

⁴⁹ James Strachey, 'Editor's Note', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 239-42 (p. 46).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 239-42.

⁵¹ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 249.

recognizing it as its own ego.⁵² In death, suggests Freud, the ‘narcissistic identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis, the result of which is that in spite of the conflict with the loved person the love-relation need not be given up’.⁵³

Hans Schiller’s capacity to stand in as an ego-ideal on both a familial and a group level is intimated throughout the narrative. In particular, he procures a high-standing position within the Algerian village of Aïn Deb to which he flees after the collapse of the Third Reich and is much revered for having fought on behalf of the colonized during the Algerian war of independence of 1954–62: ‘on venait le consulter, l’écouter, il avait une solution pour tout [...]. Son savoir, son expérience, son art de l’organisation, son autorité naturelle avaient voté pour lui sans qu’il fût utile de plaider’.⁵⁴ He becomes a *cheikh*, following his conversion to Islam, and is buried with all the honours attributed to the martyrs who fought in the anticolonial war. In many ways paralleling the German population’s melancholic/narcissistic attachment to their lost Führer in the aftermath of the Second World War, the death of the idealized paternal figure incites a profound melancholic reaction in Rachel.⁵⁵ Yet Hans Schiller’s position as an ego-ideal is overshadowed by his role in the Holocaust, and the ambiguity of his subject-position—idealized father and cold executioner—underpins and heightens the conflict of ambivalence that is inherent to Freudian melancholia:

In melancholia, the occasions which give rise to the illness extend for the most part beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed, which can import opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence. This conflict due to ambivalence [...] must not be overlooked among the preconditions of melancholia.⁵⁶

⁵² Ibid., p. 249.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 249.

⁵⁴ Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand*, p. 44.

⁵⁵ Mitscherlich, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, p. 251.

Ambivalence becomes a key component of the subject's relationship with the object, which is then continually incorporated and repulsed ad infinitum in a *fort/da* dialectic. It is this ambivalence, rather than a perceived ethical desire to preserve the other that, for Judith Butler, is the root cause of the subject's continued attachment to the object.⁵⁷

In *Le Village de l'Allemand* any process of working through is thwarted by Rachel and Malrich's inability to deal with their father's multiple subject-positions and the ethical conflicts they trigger. This complexity is attenuated by Hans Schiller's liminal position vis-à-vis the victim-perpetrator paradigm, which destabilizes the fixed binary between the two. Malrich attests to the ethical difficulties of dealing with the loss of his father when he wonders:

Comment condamner l'un et honorer l'autre, haïr le bourreau d'hier, un inconnu pour moi, et aimer le père, papa, la victime d'aujourd'hui, victime de ceux-là dont nous sommes la cible à présent?⁵⁸

As a victim and perpetrator of genocide, Hans Schiller problematizes the recent turn to melancholia and victimhood, since it is unclear how one might account for the symbolic loss of multiple and divergent subject-positions within one object.

The ambivalence that Freud regarded as central to melancholia is often either absent from post-Freudian accounts or else the ambivalent rage experienced by the melancholic is conceived as a symbol of dissention against those who would disparage or neglect the object. Yet in melancholia, the rage that arises out of the subject's ambiguous relationship to the lost other is invariably inflicted upon the self since the grieving ego has adopted the guise of the object. According to Freud, the 'self-tormenting in melancholia [...] signifies [...] a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have

⁵⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 83-84.

⁵⁸ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 138.

been turned round upon the subject's own self'.⁵⁹ Rachel's self-critical journal entries can thus be read as veiled attacks on Hans Schiller, but they appear as auto-critiques, giving expression to Freud's analysis of the melancholic as he who regards himself as 'worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished'.⁶⁰ Indeed, Rachel manifests many symptoms that read as typically Freudian. In melancholia, remarks Freud, while the subject may know *who* was lost, he will not know *what* was lost about that person because the loss remains unconscious.⁶¹ This is apparent in Rachel's desperate exhortation, which figures as a melancholic, and ultimately futile, refrain throughout the narrative: 'Mon Dieu, qui me dira qui est mon père?'.⁶²

As the basis for subject identification is rendered unstable, the loss of ego manifests itself as a 'cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, [and] inhibition of all activity',⁶³ an apt description of Rachel's debilitating sense of isolation: 'j'étais absent de la vie, la distance entre le monde et moi s'était trop étirée, le flou s'était installé, le silence s'était épaissi, les heures passaient à vide et le vide se creusait de lui-même'.⁶⁴ He rejects his wife Ophélie, who eventually abandons him and emigrates to Canada, and loses his lucrative position in a multinational corporation in Paris. His anxiety becomes so acute that he isolates himself for weeks at a time within his apartment: 'J'inspirais la peur et le dégoût, c'est vrai, avec mon air cadavérique et mon regard halluciné. J'étais un mort'.⁶⁵ Moreover, the hyperbole of his repetitive exhortation, 'Seul

⁵⁹ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 251.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁶² Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, pp. 192, 243.

⁶³ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 244.

⁶⁴ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 171.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

comme personne au monde’, which is also hauntingly replicated by Malrich throughout the text, points not only to the sense of abandonment inherent to melancholia, but also to the way in which the melancholic subject places emphasis on his exceptional status.⁶⁶ His employment of the superlative marks the manner in which the melancholic ‘subject is guilty. They have been condemned. There is a certainty here of being the worst, the least loveable, the greatest sinner’.⁶⁷

Rachel’s apparent attempts to empathize with the victims of the Holocaust are frequently undermined by his self-referential melancholic meanderings as well as his attendant narcissistic attachment to Hans Schiller. Any attempt to work through—no matter how tentatively—what it might have meant to have been a victim of the death camps is thwarted by his fixation on his father’s role in the Holocaust. In spite of Freud’s premise that narcissism is central to melancholic subject-object relations, some post-Freudian theory has tended to neglect this aspect of his psychoanalytical model, presumably because it problematizes the notion that melancholia preserves the alterity of the other at all costs. Derrida, as we have seen, contends that some critics are too quick to allude to narcissism, suggesting instead that it is a paradoxical and altogether more open-ended structure than one would imagine.⁶⁸ Derrida’s ethical conception of incorporation disavows the possibility of narcissistic identification with the dead other, channelling instead the idea that incorporation maintains the self/other binary. Yet this theoretical ideal cannot be upheld in all instances, since melancholia, as an unconscious psychological mechanism, operates independently of the individual’s will.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 66, 111, 113, 136, 171, 216, 272, 301.

⁶⁷ Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia, and Depression* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2008), p. 38.

⁶⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), p. 52.

This inadvertent movement toward narcissistic identification is manifest throughout Sansal's narrative as Rachel identifies increasingly with his father and, as will be discussed later, with the victims of the Holocaust:

J'étais dans la peau et le quotidien squelettique d'un déporté qui attend la fin et j'étais dans la peau de mon père, jaloux de son sacerdoce, qui apporte la fin. Les deux extrêmes étaient réunis en moi pour le pire. Comme les mâchoires d'un étau fermé.⁶⁹

As Rachel's sense of self declines, the boundary between self and other is dissolved. He journeys throughout Europe to uncover the traces of his father's past, careful to ensure that he emulates Hans Schiller's trajectory as closely as possible: 'j'avais enfourché les pensées de papa et mis mon pas dans le sien'.⁷⁰ Rachel's identification with his father intensifies as his journey progresses, culminating with his arrival in Cairo, where he constructs a replica of a photograph of his father taken some fifty years earlier, just after the conclusion of the Second World War. Posing as Hans Schiller in precisely the same location, with three English women substituting for those in the original picture, he succeeds in procuring '[u]ne réplique exacte de l'originale'.⁷¹ His haunting reenactment of his father's history gives expression to Dominick LaCapra's notion of melancholia as a mode of 'acting-out', in which 'one has a mimetic relation to the past which is regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription'.⁷² What should be 'postmemory', then, almost becomes reality as the temporal and ontological frontiers between past and present, father and son, are gradually erased.⁷³

Rachel's identification with his father also plays out in the field of semantics. In an analysis of melancholic identification, Eric Santner argues that the 'paradox of

⁶⁹ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 172.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁷² LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, p. 45.

⁷³ Marianna Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 17.

[melancholic] narcissism is that the narcissist loves an object only insofar and as long as he or she can repress the otherness of the object; narcissistic love plays itself out in the (non)-space where “I” and “you” are not perceived as hard edges’.⁷⁴ This blurring of the boundary between self and other can be traced in the following passage from the novel:

je suis instantanément entré dans la peau de papa. Je m’en suis fait une façon de mieux le connaître, j’entre dans ses pensées, je mets mon pas dans le sien et je vais le long de son terrible chemin. Je suis Hyde et Jekyll en même temps. Je me voyais, après une extraordinaire chevauchée à travers la Pologne, la Slovaquie, la Hongrie, la Roumanie [...] Je me voyais, sursautant au moindre bruit, écouter la BBC qui annonçait triomphalement la fin du monde, la fin de notre monde [...] Je pensais à Uelzen et j’entendais mes vieux parents gémir sous les décombres.⁷⁵

The distinction between Rachel, the speaking subject of the narrative, and Hans Schiller, the object of the discourse, is initially explicit. Yet the apparent stability of the signifier/signified dialectic is soon destabilized as the signifiers shift and the referent of the initial pronoun ‘je’ transmutes almost seamlessly into the father, revealing the ‘I’ to have no fixed ontological meaning. While at first Rachel objectifies himself as his father, maintaining a modicum of distance between their identities—‘je me voyais’—he soon fully occupies his father’s subject-position, thinking as his father. The passage thus demonstrates what Abraham and Torok view as the deconstruction of identity that arises when the subject identifies narcissistically with the lost object.⁷⁶ If the object has become tainted in some way, they suggest, what occurs is a ‘vraie déception narcissique’ that leads to ‘une schizophrénie, avec destruction interne et de l’objet et de soi’.⁷⁷ This schizophrenic splitting of the ego, similarly alluded to by Freud in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, is evidenced by Rachel’s description of

⁷⁴ Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 2-3.

⁷⁵ Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand*, pp. 233-23.

⁷⁶ Abraham and Torok, p. 316.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

himself as Jekyll and Hyde, suggesting the more sinister elements of melancholic object-investment.⁷⁸

Vicarious Victimhood

As Sansal's narrative progresses, the melancholic impoverishment of Rachel's ego is shown to be inextricable from his increasing, disproportional sense of victimhood. His acute loss of subjectivity is evident when he asserts, 'J'étais perdu, je me cherche moi-même',⁷⁹ and 'J'étais un enfant perdu'.⁸⁰ He also describes himself in detached, objectified terms as 'un inconnu, un intrus mal fichu, un étranger pas folichon, un malade qui rumine des abominations d'un autre temps, d'un autre monde'.⁸¹ Rachel then establishes a clear connection between melancholia and victimhood when he laments, 'Tout en moi était cassé. J'étais comme ces gens définitivement brisés, veufs d'un grand amour ou rescapés d'un désastre absolu, qui entrent dans des deuils qui ne finissent jamais'.⁸² His citation figures melancholia as an incapacitating, wholly undesired mode of grief that is not simply inaugurated by moments of victimization: it also engenders and sustains victimhood. The symbiotic and cyclical way in which melancholia and victimhood feed off each other is analysed by Naqvi, who argues that the dialectical movement of individuals between victimhood and victimization is an intrinsic component of melancholia's self-devaluation and fixation on past suffering.⁸³ The iterative looping of the melancholic returns repeatedly

⁷⁸ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 249.

⁷⁹ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 66.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁸³ Naqvi, p. 102.

to moments of loss in which the ego was slighted, or concomitantly to moments when the individual was the aggressor.

The moments of victimhood to which Rachel repeatedly returns are not necessarily his own, however. Revealing how he wants to experience the reality of ‘un déporté [...] seul comme personne au monde’,⁸⁴ he figures himself as the victim of his Nazi father and the institutional silences of the post-war period, ultimately substituting his own victim position for that of the Holocaust victim:

À ma manière, je suis un rescapé [...] Se découvrir le fils d’un bourreau est pire que d’avoir été soi-même un bourreau. Le bourreau a ses justifications [...] Mais le fils, que peut-il, sinon compter les crimes de son père et traîner le boulet sa vie durant? J’en veux à mon père, j’en veux à ce pays, à ce système qui l’a fait ainsi, j’en veux à l’humanité, j’en veux à la terre entière.⁸⁵

Rachel’s metonymic substitution of the family for the larger historical configuration of the Holocaust is emblematic of much second-generation literature, which tends to frame the memory of the Holocaust within a familial context. ‘En parlant de “fils” et de “pères”, on évite de parler d’état ou de responsabilité collective’, suggests Mireille Rosello in a recent discussion of Sansal’s novel.⁸⁶ Although Rosello’s remarks are framed within the context of French colonialism and the current debate surrounding repentance, Sansal engages with the father-son paradigm in order to critique the way in which some literary accounts ‘reduc[e] [the Shoah] to a mere battle between father and child, in which the child is figured as the father’s victim and thus appropriates the role of the historical victims of the Holocaust’.⁸⁷

For Santner, ‘The identification with the victim on the basis of a continued refusal to work through a narcissistic pattern of object relating [...] perpetuates an incapacity to

⁸⁴ Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand*, p. 272.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁸⁶ Mireille Rosello, ‘Guerre des mémoires ou “parallèles dangereux” dans *Le Village de l’Allemand* de Boualem Sansal’, *Modern and Contemporary France*, 18.2 (2010), 193-211 (p. 203).

⁸⁷ McGlothlin, p. 19.

perceive or feel for the suffering of the real victims of Nazism'.⁸⁸ Such disavowed mourning and appropriation of the victim's identity is an apt depiction of Rachel's position throughout the novel. Although he endeavours to record the empathy he shares with the victims of the Holocaust in his journal, this empathy mutates into a form of identification that paradoxically enables him to become the victim. His solipsistic appropriation of the victim position is rendered ethically problematic and corresponds to what LaCapra identifies as 'vicarious victimhood'.⁸⁹ In such cases, argues LaCapra, empathy with the victim becomes an identity to the extent that the individual belatedly acts out the other's traumatic experience.⁹⁰ This 'acting-out' is literalized in Rachel's narrative: 'je ne peux rien de plus que mimer le déporté et tenter de sentir ses affres'.⁹¹ While Rachel lays claim to a kind of ethical relationality with the victims, his usurpation of their identity cannot but appear as self-referential and morally questionable.

Melancholic incorporation thus operates as a cannibalistic mode of grief in which the lost other is appropriated by the grieving subject.⁹² The otherness of the object is obscured by the melancholic's desire for self-preservation, often denying the lost other the opportunity to be heard *as other*. Rather than enabling a form of testimony from beyond the grave, the structure of melancholia risks silencing those it might assist. Indeed, Rachel spends much time ruminating on his own existential victimhood, rather than on the suffering of others, positioning himself as the archetypal victim bar none: 'j'étais une victime, la victime, fils de victimes, la douleur est vraie, profonde, mystérieuse, indicible'.⁹³ Like the ubiquitous

⁸⁸ Santner, p. 6.

⁸⁹ Dominick LaCapra, 'Trauma, Absence, Loss', *Critical Inquiry*, 25.4 (1999), 696-727 (p. 699).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 699.

⁹¹ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 272.

⁹² Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 249.

⁹³ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 25.

theorist evoked by Geoffrey Bennington, Rachel's 'ethical piety' is belied, paradoxically, by his own self-proclaimed vested interest in the other:⁹⁴

Je l'ai suivi de bout en bout [...] Je n'ai reculé nulle part, à aucun moment, ni devant la chambre à gaz, ni devant l'incroyable quotidien du déporté [...] Si les murs des camps, si les fantômes des déportés [...] pouvaient témoigner, ils diraient: oui, cet homme n'a pas ménagé ses forces, il peut parler, il sait.⁹⁵

Rachel lays claim to the 'truth' of the Holocaust, problematically investing himself with the authority to witness and testify on behalf of the victims of the extermination camps. At its worst, the passage reads like a pretention of mastery: unlike the genuine victims of the Holocaust, Rachel claims to have faced the horrors of the gas chambers directly, heroically even, and returned relatively unscathed to narrate his experience. He appropriates the spectres of the camps, and their experiences vicariously become his own to the extent that he does not even speak for the victims, but for himself: it is *his* knowledge, *his* experience, and *his* voice that emerge through the narrative. While the dead are merely homogenous phantoms, it is his subjective 'I' that comes to the fore, ironically revealing how, despite his realization that 'Les victimes meurent toujours deux fois', he fails to acknowledge how he also inadvertently dissimulates knowledge.⁹⁶

The appropriation of the Holocaust victim reaches its apex in Rachel's suicide, which, appearing at the beginning and the conclusion of the narrative, emphasizes the looping rhetoric of the melancholic. His suicide embodies the myriad tensions surrounding the lost object and figures as a literalization of the 'struggle of ambivalence [that] loosen[s] the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating it and even as it were

⁹⁴ Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 39.

⁹⁵ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 303.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

killing it'.⁹⁷ The ambivalence inherent to melancholic object-relations, as we have seen, manifests itself frequently in Rachel's relationship with his father and accounts for what Sansal, in a recent interview, describes as the ambiguous nature of his suicide:

[I]l condamne son père, il se met du côté des victimes et va jusqu'à se gazer, comme s'il voulait tuer en lui tout ce qu'il y avait de Hans Schiller [...] Mais en même temps, et l'ambiguïté est là, il veut payer pour son père comme pour lui témoigner son amour et l'absoudre.⁹⁸

This ambivalence also manifests itself in psychoanalytic accounts of suicide. Following on from Freud who contends that 'the ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object-cathexis, it can treat itself as an object',⁹⁹ Julia Kristeva suggests that 'la plainte contre soi serait donc une plainte contre un autre et la mise à mort de soi, un déguisement tragique du massacre d'un autre'.¹⁰⁰ Concomitantly, however, the Kleinian theorist Esther Sánchez-Pardo reads suicide as a gesture of love, arguing that 'The suicide of the melancholic is essentially an act of love that aims to save and preserve his or her objects, not only from the threats and dangers of the outside world but also from his or her own sadism and hate'.¹⁰¹

In one respect, then, Rachel's suicide can be regarded as a symbolic act of patricide resulting in the second, figurative death of his father. This notion of suicide as the annihilation of the incorporated object is evident in the following passage:

Il l'avait choisi très exactement, ce moment: le 24 avril 1996 à 23 heures. C'est le 24 avril 1994 aux alentours de 23 heures qu'est intervenu le massacre de Aïn Deb. Papa, maman et nos voisins en étaient les victimes, mais c'est aussi à ce moment que Hans Schiller le SS, l'exterminateur, l'usurpateur, a fini sa vie [...] Pour Rachel, justice n'était pas faite.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 257.

⁹⁸ Mégevand, p. 112.

⁹⁹ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 252.

¹⁰⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Soleil noir: dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 20.

¹⁰¹ Esther Sánchez-Pardo, *Cultures of the Death Drive: Melanie Klein and Modernist Literature* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 125.

¹⁰² Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 230.

Occurring as it does on precisely the same date as the massacre in Aïn Deb, Rachel's suicide enacts a call for justice and can be read as the manifestation of his contempt for Hans Schiller. Yet his death also marks a symbolic attempt to atone for his father's past and to liberate the Schiller family from their shameful lineage: 'C'était le prix qu'il voulait payer, à la place de papa, pour les victimes des camps et sans doute pour moi, pour me libérer du fardeau de notre dette'.¹⁰³ In this sense, his death is not only an act of patricide but also has a sacrificial basis. While he desires justice, Rachel similarly endeavours to redeem his father from his complicity in the Holocaust, and thus his suicide can be interpreted as the ultimate act of filial loyalty. Earlier in his narrative he contends, 'il reste ce recours ultime pour se préserver: le suicide',¹⁰⁴ and certainly he regards his own death as 'un geste d'amour' through which he reclaims the memory of his father.¹⁰⁵ 'Je paie pour un autre. Je veux le sauver, parce que c'est mon père, parce que c'est un homme'.¹⁰⁶ This appeal in defence of Hans Schiller's universal humanism sits uncomfortably with his Nazism, especially considering that the discourse of National Socialism constructed the Jewish populations as vermin; it is a disquiet that is further underlined by the lexis of the passage, which gestures toward Primo Levi's *Si c'est un homme*, cited, ironically, by Rachel within the narrative.¹⁰⁷

Rachel's suicide and his position as a 'victime-bourreau' problematizes the recent turn towards an ethics of melancholia in several ways.¹⁰⁸ By killing the incorporated object, it subverts the basic tenet that melancholia preserves the other at all costs. Yet even if his suicide is read as an act of preservation, this is rendered equally challenging because it

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 294.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 306.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 305.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁰⁸ Rosello, 'Guerre des mémoires', p. 207.

safeguards the memory of a perpetrator, all the while obscuring the memory of the real victims of the Holocaust. Indeed, while Rachel ostensibly seeks to establish a sense of solidarity with his father's victims, his compassion is undermined by the self-referential nature of his suicide in which he symbolically acts out the death of the gas chamber victims by asphyxiating himself in his garage with 'la tête rasée', wearing 'un drôle de pyjama, un pyjama rayé'.¹⁰⁹ Reflecting on his brother's limiting, theatrical appropriation of an experience that can never be fully articulated or comprehended, Malrich contends that, 'il voulait mourir gazé comme les victimes de notre père, comme si c'était papa lui-même qui le gazait'.¹¹⁰ Rachel's suicide is ultimately informed more by his family history and the way in which it impacts upon his own subjectivity and sense of victimhood than it is by a genuine empathy with the dead. His contentious replication of the gas chambers appears as a gross parody of the Final Solution, creating an image of the Holocaust as a spectacle that can be reduced to a singular image; and while the victims had no agency, Rachel ultimately does and, thus, by opting for death over life, he merely makes a mockery of their experience.¹¹¹

The complexity of Rachel's suicide and the way in which it lends itself to myriad interpretations serves to confuse the lost object and gives rise to a state of existential victimhood in which everyone is a victim of something. In *Soleil noir*, Kristeva states that new forms of loss are often imbricated in previous ones.¹¹² This is an ever-present danger in *Le Village de l'Allemand*, where the loss of Hans Schiller as an ego-ideal becomes symbolically interchangeable with the millions who died in the Holocaust. Malrich thus questions the ethical implications of his brother's suicide:

¹⁰⁹ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 12.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

¹¹¹ In 'Guerre des mémoires' Rosello also argues that 'La mise en scène de Rachel peut être perçue comme une tragique parodie de la mort des déportés' (p. 202).

¹¹² Kristeva, *Soleil noir*, p. 14.

Dans son journal, il y a trois pages sur son suicide [...] Il dit que c'est un acte d'amour pour notre père et pour ses victimes. Je ne sais pas si c'est juste d'associer ce qui ne peut l'être, de faire un seul et même geste pour la victime et le bourreau.¹¹³

Sansal points to the need for differing modes of mourning that take into account the divergent ethical demands surrounding victims and perpetrators—as well as victims-cum-perpetrators—suggesting that the lost object must be clearly identifiable if any ethical mode of working through is to be inaugurated.¹¹⁴ Similarly, in *Representing the Holocaust*, LaCapra warns of the dangers of confusing the lost object, defining it as a major hindrance in the years following the Second World War:

it is important that the need to specify the object of mourning be recognized as a crucial problem. In the case of postwar Germans, it was often unclear to what extent Hitler was the lost loved object. The occlusion of this object facilitated avoidance or denial, and it was accompanied by a tendency to obscure the problem of Jewish victims who were not valued recipients of emotion.¹¹⁵

As LaCapra's logic suggests, melancholic reactions to loss risk conflating or obfuscating the lost object because it remains withdrawn from consciousness and subject to reconceptualization. Parodying the German nation's melancholic obfuscation of their Führer with his victims, Rachel's melancholia conflates perpetrator and victim and, rather than honouring those who died in the camps, his attempts at remembrance serve merely to

¹¹³ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand*, p. 293.

¹¹⁴ While, for the purposes of this chapter, I focus on Rachel's melancholic appropriation of the victim subject-position, in 'Guerre des mémoires' Rosello critiques the 'dangerous parallels' that Malrich mobilizes between Nazism and Islamist discourse. In particular, Malrich's approach risks conflating the victims of Islamism with the Holocaust; indeed, this is hinted at on a micro-level in the novel as Nadia's murder by an extremist emir in a Parisian *banlieue* is framed by Malrich's description of the *banlieue* as a concentration camp. However, I would argue that Sansal deliberately deploys Malrich—depicted as naïve, uneducated, and disenfranchised—in order to underscore the dangers of viewing different socio-historical settings through a single methodological lens. Malrich's analogies are far too crude and undeveloped to be taken at face value by a reader and, when read in light of Rachel's dubious appropriation and conflation of different victim subject-positions, make an even stronger case for the idea that *Le Village de l'Allemand* calls for new and divergent memorial practices that clearly differentiate between historical contexts and their victims. Indeed, Malrich's combative approach is not proffered as a constructive alternative to Rachel's melancholic victimhood, as Rosello points out: 'Aucune des "solutions" n'est décrite comme un travail de deuil réussi' (p. 208).

¹¹⁵ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 214.

perpetuate the structures of repression, denial, and victimhood that characterized the postwar period.

The ethical and political implications of melancholia's tendency to obscure the object of mourning undermine the current utopian investment in the hybrid nature of the lost object. David Eng and David Kazanjian, for instance, argue in favour of its multivalent potential, suggesting that:

The ability of the melancholic object to express multiple losses at once speaks to its flexibility as a signifier, endowing it with not only a multifaceted but also a palimpsest-like quality. This condensation of meaning allows us to understand the lost object as continually shifting both spatially and temporally, adopting new perspectives and meanings, new social and political consequences, along the way.¹¹⁶

This postmodern take on the lost object promises myriad opportunities for the creative reimagining of the past and its objects; yet in certain historical contexts it is clear that such open-ended signification could lend itself to abuse by those who wish to (de)valorize or distort certain objects. Any form of discourse that risks conflating historical victims with their perpetrators, or with other kinds of victims, is ethically and politically hazardous, potentially enabling the production of victim ascribed counter-narratives that subvert the historical past for partisan gain. While Eng and Kazanjian can only speculate as to the creative or political potential that may arise from the contingent nature of the object, Sansal's novel clearly demonstrates how such flexibility runs the risk of further marginalizing the very victims that recent theories of melancholia attempt to reclaim. *Le Village de l'Allemand* thus offers a timely exploration of the intersections between victimhood and melancholia, suggesting the need for modes of working upon the past that eschew these dominant memorial paradigms.

¹¹⁶ David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, 'Introduction: Mourning Remains', in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 1-28 (p. 5).

CHAPTER THREE

Nostalgic Returns in Assia Djébar's *La Disparition de la langue française* (2003)

Allées et venues, aller-retour,
retour, lents retours. Les
compter, les décompter dans
l'élan dru ou par cercles de
mélancolie, retour au pays, à la
terre, à la maison de mon père.

*Assia Djébar*¹

If, for Fatima Naqvi, it is the paradigm of victimhood that best characterizes the contemporary era,² Svetlana Boym confidently contends that ‘The twentieth century began with a futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia’.³ Indeed, much like melancholia towards the end of the twentieth century, nostalgia has become a trope par excellence of the postmodern condition, providing a useful frame of reference for the sense of groundlessness that followed the deconstruction of grand narratives or ‘métadiscours’.⁴ Fredric Jameson, for instance, speaks of the yearning for ‘the memory of deep memory’⁵ as well as the ‘nostalgia for nostalgia’⁶ in the face of the ‘depthlessness’ of the postmodern era.⁷ For Boym, as well as for Dennis Walder, Marianne Hirsch, and Leo Spitzer, nostalgia is a symptom of our time and a marker of structural absence and loss.⁸ Exiled from language and, therefore, from a ‘true’ authentic sense of identity, the postmodern individual is implicitly aware that a return to origins is impossible, all the while remaining paradoxically nostalgic for that lost ‘homeland’.

¹ Assia Djébar, *Oran, langue morte* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1997), p. 49.

² Fatima Naqvi, *The Literary and Cultural Rhetoric of Victimhood: Western Europe 1970-2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 3-4.

³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xiii.

⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979), p. 7.

⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 156.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸ See Dennis Walder, ‘Writing, Representation, and Postcolonial Nostalgia’, *Textual Practice*, 23 (2009), 935-56 (p. 935); Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, “‘We would not have come without you’: Generations of Nostalgia’, in *Contested Pasts: the Politics of Memory*, ed. by Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 79-95 (p. 82).

This category of loss represents what Dominick LaCapra refers to as ‘structural’ or ‘tranhistorical’ loss, which, although figured as lost, perhaps never existed to begin with.⁹ LaCapra offers the religious narrative of the fall from the Garden of Eden as an example, critiquing the manner in which the conflation of absence with loss:

threatens to convert subsequent accounts into displacements of the story of original sin wherein a prelapsarian state of unity or identity—whether real or fictive—is understood as giving way through a fall to difference and conflict.¹⁰

Nostalgia thus encompasses a realm of different beliefs and positions; a religious follower can be nostalgic for a lost Eden, while a philosopher might be nostalgic for what he knows never was. As Sylviane Agacinski remarks, ‘The motifs of the fall, or the unfortunate “depropriation”, of nostalgia, even of exile, are the mark of religious or metaphysical thinking that condemns the present world’.¹¹

As a manifestation of loss, nostalgia is clearly imbricated in the so-called memory boom of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries discussed in my introduction. Nostalgia marks a desire to maintain the vestiges of the past, preserving and perpetuating items, events, people, and places as they once were, either in tangible archival form or in a more discursive mnemonic form. In many ways, the concept of nostalgia overlaps with that of melancholia, not simply in its symbolic application as both a signifier of loss and a response to that loss in contemporary theory, but also, as we shall see, in terms of its symptoms and ambivalent relationship to the lost love object. First identified by physicians in Switzerland, the concept was used to denote the *maladie du pays* suffered by soldiers who had left their

⁹ Dominick, LaCapra, ‘Trauma, Absence, Loss’, *Critical Inquiry*, 25 (1999), 696-727 (pp. 699-700).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 700. For an example of the conversion of historical absence into loss see Mustapha Hamil, ‘Postcolonialism and its Ghosts in Tahar Djaout’s *Les Chercheurs d’os*’, *The French Review*, 81 (2007), 351-64. He writes that, ‘The encounter with the imperial West has sullied the purity of identity and purposefully engineered its fragmentation. The postcolonial state has failed to piece together this identity, to re-establish the wholeness of the North African self’ (p. 359).

¹¹ Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, trans. by Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 18.

native land; eventually it ‘acquired the status of a variant of melancholia, and continued to be viewed as a distinct disorder until the beginning of the twentieth century’.¹² As Walder points out, the somatic manifestations of nostalgia were typically akin to those of melancholia to the extent that, historically, what divided them was more the social rank of their sufferer than any real physiological difference between the two states:

[Nostalgia] shared some of the features traditionally associated with Hamlet’s disease, melancholia, which however was an ailment of intellectuals, whereas nostalgia was more democratic, affecting soldiers and sailors displaced from home, and country people who had moved to the cities.¹³

Ever since Aristotle’s insistence upon the relationship between ‘black bile’ and masculine creativity, melancholia has been associated with acumen; even Freud’s seminal analysis of melancholia cannot escape the historical connection between pathological mourning and intellect.¹⁴ What separates melancholia from nostalgia is perhaps nothing more than its repeated conceptualization as an affliction of the gifted intellectual.

Certainly, nostalgia and melancholia are both extreme responses to object loss, be it real or imagined, and nostalgics and melancholics alike are unable to accept the reality of their loss, choosing instead to resurrect the lost object within their psychic topography. As Hirsch and Spitzer point out, in nostalgia the ‘absence’ or ‘loss’ can ‘never be made ‘presence’ and ‘gain’ except through memory and the creativity of reconstruction’.¹⁵ This description of the phantomogenic structure of nostalgia clearly resonates with that of melancholia, in which ‘the ego attempts to compensate for the loss by introjecting the object

¹² Stanley Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: from Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 373.

¹³ Walder, ‘Writing’, p. 939.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, in *On the History of the Psycho-analytic Movement: Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 243-58 (p. 246).

¹⁵ Hirsch and Spitzer, p. 82.

and thus posing as the object for the id'.¹⁶ While it is not clear if the nostalgic identifies with the lost object in quite the same manner as the melancholic, that is, by identifying *as* the lost object, nostalgia, as will become clear from my discussion of *La Disparition de la langue française*, is still very much tied up with identity formation. Melanie Klein has, moreover, discussed the way in which the melancholic ranges ambivalently from 'over-admiration (idealization) or contempt (devaluation)' with regard to the object.¹⁷ As intimated in Chapter Two, melancholia arises out of the subject's idealized attachment to the love object, which is admired as a narcissistic reflection of the self. Employing strikingly similar concepts to describe nostalgia, Nancy Wood argues that:

Psychoanalysis has usefully elucidated the ambivalent psychical nature of nostalgia by identifying a pathological potential in this mode of remembering, where an idealization of the past is accompanied by a refusal to accept that this past can never return. In steadfastly clinging to a past cathected as a lost love object, nostalgia serves the function of denial and of a defence against, and substitute for, mourning.¹⁸

Like the melancholic, the nostalgic idealizes the lost past, foreclosing loss and desperately holding on to something that cannot realistically be resurrected. It is interesting that while Freud posits melancholia as a 'pathological condition' that arises in lieu of mourning, Wood similarly conceives nostalgia as a pathological mode of remembering that stands in for mourning.¹⁹ Furthermore, Wood's description of nostalgia as a construct which acts as a form of denial and defence against mourning is evocative of the analysis of melancholia put forth by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich.²⁰

While the symptoms and causes of nostalgia and melancholia are clearly comparable, both conditions tend to be analysed as separate entities. If their difference was originally

¹⁶ Christina Wald, *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia: Performance Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), p. 164.

¹⁷ Melanie Klein, *Contributions to Psycho-analysis: 1921-1945*, vol. 34 (London: Hogarth, 1950), pp. 319-20.

¹⁸ Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), p. 145.

¹⁹ Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 243.

²⁰ Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, trans. by Beverley R. Placzek (New York: Grove Press, 1975), p. 15.

predicated on social class, today melancholia is often conceived as a potent force by critics and exponents alike, while nostalgia is frequently figured as a benign mode of retrospection. As Walder suggests, it is ‘familiar’ and associated with ‘the good old days’: ‘have we not all been there at sometime?’ he asks.²¹ It is associated with a banal ‘sentimental kitsch’ and, as such, deemed unworthy of much critical scholarship.²² Yet such a reading of nostalgia discounts its more contentious aspects and wilfully ignores its connection to melancholia. Given the analogies between the two, it is perhaps more useful to consider nostalgia’s original conceptualization as a particular form of melancholia.

Nostalgia was first associated with the loss of one’s homeland, and its etymological roots show it to have a lengthy historical connection to issues of exile and homelessness, both in a literal and a figurative sense: ‘Nostalgia (from nostos—return home, and algia—longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed’.²³ Nostalgia, then, refers simultaneously to both a form of exile or displacement from a ‘homely’ space and the subsequent issues of loss and melancholia brought about by such displacement. Similarly, Freud conceived the loss of ‘one’s country’ as just one of many losses that can engender melancholia.²⁴ For Homi Bhabha, ‘the unhomely is a paradigmatic postcolonial experience’ that gives expression to the liminal postmodern/postcolonial subject and its endless migrations and diasporic meanderings.²⁵ ‘To be unhomed is not to be homeless’, he writes.²⁶ Instead the

²¹ Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory* (New York; London: Routledge, 2011), p. 4.

²² Ibid., p. 4. See also Avishai Margalit, ‘Nostalgia’, *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 21.3 (2011), 271-80. Margalit also observes how ‘On the face of it nostalgia looks innocuous and basically like a harmless faint emotion, and in many cases it is’ (p. 273).

²³ Boym, p. xiii.

²⁴ Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, p. 243.

²⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, ‘The World and the Home’, in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. by Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Elle Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 445-55 (p. 446).

²⁶ Ibid., p. 445.

unhomely marks a constant process of renegotiation and endless coming-into-being. While Bhabha conceives the unhomely as a productive cross-cultural phenomenon, Djébar's examination of exile and return in *La Disparition de la langue française* is altogether more circumspect, underlining Bhabha's tendency to overlook the more problematic aspects of the concept. Bhabha, it should be clear, does not refer specifically to the term nostalgia, choosing instead to engage with the term 'unhomely', which derives from the Freudian concept of the *unheimlich*.

The *unheimlich* translates literally into English as 'unhomely' and refers to 'that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar'.²⁷ Importantly, then, Freud is at pains to point out that the *unheimlich* does not equate to the 'unfamiliar', but is instead a sentiment arising out of the return of something which was once known to consciousness.²⁸ The 'uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed'.²⁹ The process of repetition itself is 'a source of the sense of the uncanny',³⁰ remarks Freud, and Boym too suggests that 'Nostalgia tantalizes us with its fundamental ambivalence; it is about the repetition of the unrepeatable, materialization of the immaterial'.³¹ Drawing upon the concept of the *unheimlich*, Boym contends that, 'At first glance it appears that the uncanny is a fear of the familiar, whereas nostalgia is a longing for it; yet for a nostalgic, the lost home and the home abroad often appear haunted'.³² Nostalgia is

²⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 123-62 (p. 124).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

³¹ Boym, p. xvii.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 251.

in many ways a form of *unheimlich*, then, in which the lost homeland returns to haunt the individual.

Returning Home: Berkane's 'Reflective' Nostalgia

In *La Disparition de la langue française* Djébar implicitly evokes the Freudian *unheimlich* as a means of exploring the difficulties of returning to a place of origin imagined as 'home'. The opening narrative section, entitled 'Le retour', is set in 1991 and figures Berkane's initial euphoria as he returns to Algeria after twenty years of exile in the Parisian *banlieue*:

Je reviens donc, aujourd'hui même, au pays... "Homeland", le mot, étrangement, en anglais, chantait, ou dansait en moi, je ne sais plus: quel est ce jour où, face à la mer intense et verte, je me remis à écrire.³³

The rendering of the French term *patrie* by its English equivalent 'Homeland' creates an uncanny effect: a term that ostensibly designates a particular known place of origin becomes other to itself as the gap between signifier and referent is accentuated. Within the French language the term takes on its own strange signification, dancing and singing within Berkane's mind. The employment of the noun *homeland*, which is repeated uncannily in the novel's opening page, can, moreover, be read as a literalization of Boym's assertion that, 'When we start speaking of home and homeland, we experience the first failure of homecoming. How does one communicate the pain of loss in a foreign language?'.³⁴ Berkane's idiosyncratic use of the English term conveys his dislocation from his *lieu d'origine* at the self-same moment he returns to Algeria, marking his inability to capture in language the experience of doubling he meets with. The term *homeland* thus gives expression to the manner in which 'the constructed familiarity of the nostalgic brushes against an

³³ Assia Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française* (Paris: Albin Michel), p. 13.

³⁴ Boym, p. 251.

alternative, double space that speaks the same language but inverts it into the unfamiliar and frightening'.³⁵ The very first sentence of the novel anticipates how Berkane will ultimately remain a foreigner within a space he deems home; he is, to use Djébar's phrase, an 'Étranger à l'Étranger',³⁶ or put another way, 'Homeless at home'.³⁷ This epigraph to the final narrative section of *La Disparition de la langue française*, a quotation from Emily Dickinson, epitomizes Berkane's particular experience of the *unheimlich* in the place he refers to as 'chez moi'.³⁸

In *The Future of Nostalgia* Boym theorizes two different forms of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. Though not conceived as fixed separate entities, Boym explains that restorative nostalgia 'characterises national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths'.³⁹ Berkane is critical of the 'anesthésie des mémoires en pays du tiers-monde', and it is apparent that this form of nostalgia accounts for the mythologizing of the Algerian past enacted by both the *Front de Libération Nationale* and the *Front Islamique du Salut*.⁴⁰ In contrast with restorative nostalgia, which 'stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home',⁴¹ Boym posits reflective nostalgia as that which 'thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately'.⁴² Reflective nostalgia is more idiosyncratic and 'oriented toward an individual narrative that

³⁵ Janet Sorenson, 'Writing Historically, Speaking Nostalgically: the Competing Languages of Nation in Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor*', in *Narratives of Nostalgia, Gender and Nationalism*, ed. by Jean Pickering and Suzanne Kehde (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 30-51 (p. 46).

³⁶ Assia Djébar, *Ces voix qui m'assiègent: en marge de ma francophonie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999), p. 224.

³⁷ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 181.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁹ Boym, p. 41.

⁴⁰ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 68. This connection will be explored in depth in Chapter Four.

⁴¹ Boym, p. xviii.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

savours details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself'.⁴³ In contrast to the restorative nostalgia that characterizes the FIS's desire for a return to putative origins, Djébar's oeuvre can be seen to engage with a certain form of reflective nostalgia. As Stephan Leopold has recently argued:

L'écriture postcoloniale d'Assia Djébar, qui se trouve par son double a priori séparée d'une origine univoque, est une écriture qui ne parle que du retour: d'un retour aporétique, bien entendu, qui n'a rien à voir avec cet autre retour entrepris par le nationalisme arabe.⁴⁴

While Djébar's writing process in many ways enacts a self-reflexive search for origins, *La Disparition de la langue française* does not simply endorse reflective nostalgia as a response to the restorative return proposed by the FLN or the FIS. More so than any of her previous novels, it points to the dangers of a certain form of retrospective or nostalgic memory that focuses on the past at the expense of the politics of the present.

In *La Disparition de la langue française* Berkane's nostalgia can thus be understood in terms of Boym's notion of reflective nostalgia. He readily admits that his return to Algeria was somewhat belated or postponed, writing, 'S'agite en moi le pourquoi de cet exil si long et clôturé si tard'.⁴⁵ His attempts to write his past through a series of journal entries, as well as his desire to capture the minutiae of Algeria's ruins through the medium of photography reveal, moreover, an individual who seeks intimate relationships. He shies away from political or nationalist debate, choosing instead to lose himself in nostalgic yearnings for an irrevocably lost homeland. What is more, his nostalgia centres upon the ruins of the past, just as, for Boym, 'reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁴ Stephan Leopold, 'Figures d'un impossible retour: L'inaccessible chez Assia Djébar', in *Assia Djébar, littérature et transmission*, ed. by Wolfgang Asholt, Mireille Calle-Gruber and Dominique Combe (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010), pp. 141-56 (p. 143).

⁴⁵ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 20.

dreams of another place and another time'.⁴⁶ The narrator of *La Disparition de la langue française* contends that 'Il s'est oublié dans ce passé d'images mortes',⁴⁷ and Berkane too remarks to his friend Amar: 'La destruction, dis-je, tu sais combien c'est pour moi une douloureuse fascination! J'aurais dû étudier pour être archéologue'.⁴⁸ He immerses himself in the historical narratives of Algeria, writing:

mon esprit est habité par une mémoire, comment dire, collective? Imaginer le jour où notre cité dite L'imprenable fut violée: l'armée française de Charles X y entre en grand apparat. [...]. Cette plongée en arrière me saisit chaque fois que je reviens sur cette place, comme si c'était moi qui reculais dans la mécanique du Temps—en l'occurrence, plus d'un siècle et demi. Pourquoi, mais pourquoi cette vision obsédante?⁴⁹

Berkane is nostalgic not simply for his own lived past, but for a temporal moment that will never be fully accessible to him. Exiled from Algiers for so long, he attempts to reinsert himself into its historical narrative in order to construct a space of origins in which he can establish his identity. As Boym argues, 'nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory'.⁵⁰

Berkane's sense of homelessness has him seeking origins in the multifaceted histories of Algeria:

Rues en lacs (celles de *Pépé le Moko* [...]), il va les revoir dans le clair-obscur de ce vieil Alger: *Djazirat el Bahdja*—la belle, la glorieuse, si longtemps, l'imprenable, sa ville en "pomme de pin", "ma cité des pirates légendaires", bribes d'histoire que sa mémoire, ce matin, sur la route, macère.⁵¹

Berkane invokes the glorious myths of Algeria's past, as well as the era of colonialism, evoked by his reference to Julien Duvivier's 1937 film *Pépé le Moko*, which is portrayed from a colonial point of view. The Casbah of his mind is thus constructed through the prism of

⁴⁶ Boym, p. 41.

⁴⁷ Djébar, *La Disparition de langue française*, p. 57.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁵⁰ Boym, p. xvi.

⁵¹ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 53.

other times, histories, and perspectives, suggesting the dichotomy between the reality of the Casbah and the imagined space he refers to as ‘ma Casbah’.⁵² His reference to his ‘vision obsédante’ points to a certain level of self-awareness and a recognition of the extreme nature of his nostalgia, yet he continually fails to probe the negative implications of his fixation upon the past.⁵³ In *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, Walder calls for:

a level of self-reflexivity about or within nostalgia. Only in this way may the sense of the difference between present and past at the heart of nostalgia counteract its undeniably negative tug towards self-indulgence and misperception.⁵⁴

Berkane never attains what Walder terms a ‘self-reflexivity about or within nostalgia’. Instead he becomes ensnared in a perpetual process of return, becoming increasingly isolated and self-absorbed as the narrative progresses.

Indeed, Berkane is unable to fully differentiate between past and present in a manner that might lead to a self-critical engagement with nostalgia. While in exile in Paris, and on his return to his coastal village in Algeria, he remains haunted by spectral figures from his past, giving expression to the way in which, ‘Reflective nostalgics [...] try to cohabit with doubles and ghosts’.⁵⁵ Once in Algeria, ‘emmuré dans [sa] solitude hantée par des ombres’, he sets to writing a series of unsent letters to his former lover Marise in Paris.⁵⁶ Marise is described in spectral terms as ‘l’absente’ and ‘l’absente pas tellement absente’, becoming an increasingly ghostly figure and an object of loss for Berkane.⁵⁷ At the same time, he speaks of how ‘cette ombre de père me hanterait’, as well as referring repeatedly to the ghost of his mother, who follows him to Paris:⁵⁸ ‘Ma mère, Mma Halima, c’est vrai qu’elle m’a suivi, par la pensée,

⁵² Ibid., p. 64.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 61

⁵⁴ Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Boym, p. 251.

⁵⁶ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 18.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

tout le temps, en France; c'est vrai que le jour de sa mort a été une journée noire'.⁵⁹ Berkane remains melancholic over her loss, describing her as a ghostly figure that lives on within his psyche: 'ma mère en moi s'étonne, ses yeux m'interrogeant...'.⁶⁰ He also describes her as 'ma mère qui rit toujours en moi'⁶¹ and writes more explicitly of 'ma mère disparue, mais vivante en moi'.⁶² His depiction of the ghostly imago corresponds to psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's concept of melancholic incorporation, in which the lost object is incorporated in an intrapsychic tomb within the grieving self in an attempt to disavow loss: 'Dans la crypte repose, vivant, reconstitué à partir de souvenirs de mots, d'images et d'affects, le corrélat objectal de la perte, en tant que personne complète'.⁶³ The incorporated figure, as discussed in Chapter One, emits a series of phantomogenic words that aim to conceal the secret that has been swallowed along with the lost object.⁶⁴

Berkane similarly intimates that his mother continues to speak through him:

il entendit distinctement la voix maternelle dérouler le *Chant de la cigogne* dans la version de Tlemcen. Sa voix pâle était mélancolique, elle ne chantait pas vraiment juste, Mma, songea-t-il avec un remords douceâtre et il s'endormit ce jour-là, conversant intérieurement en mots menus avec elle, dans son parler à elle [...]. Les soirs suivants, le même *Chant de la cigogne* lui revint dans un début de sommeil, il s'endormit successivement et à chaque fois avec la voix de Mma.⁶⁵

While ostensibly living within the present, Berkane appears to exist in a multi-temporal space since his mother's ghost persists beyond the time of her death, and he simultaneously returns to moments when she was alive. According to Boym:

Reflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones. [...]. At best, reflective nostalgia can present an ethical and creative challenge, not merely a pretext for the midnight melancholic.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶² Ibid., p. 14.

⁶³ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *L'Écorce et le noyau* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), p. 266.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 267.

⁶⁵ Djebar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Boym, p. xviii.

This passage reveals the intersections between melancholia and nostalgia and Berkane too is constructed as a nostalgic, ‘midnight melancholic’ whose mother melancholically serenades him at night: ‘Une semaine sans discontinuer, il eut des veillées à la fois de tendresse et de nostalgie’.⁶⁷ Given the correlation between melancholia and nostalgia, it is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Jacques Derrida should contend that ‘Le spectre [...], c’est aussi l’attente impatiente et nostalgique d’une rédemption, à savoir, encore, d’un esprit’.⁶⁸ By the term spirit, Derrida means an ethical relation to the other, for as one critic reminds us, ‘Spirit is never subject to deconstruction for Derrida, although it must not be construed as ontological substance; it is, rather, “an openness to the other” that is fundamental for all discourse’.⁶⁹ For Derrida, then, to be spectral is to be nostalgic; it is in turn a form of waiting for an ethical ‘future’. In Berkane’s case, however, while he is seemingly open to the multiplicity of time and the spectres that inhabit the extended ‘present’, his preoccupation with these very spectres ultimately prevents him from engaging with the living (and by extension the future of Algeria). Indeed, as will become clear, it is the living, rather than the dead, who become wholly other to him.

On his return to Algeria, Berkane’s nostalgia for the Casbah is increasingly conflated with a longing to return to his childhood: ‘Notre univers d’enfant restait limité à ce vieux cœur de la capitale’.⁷⁰ Time becomes configured as space and Berkane believes that by returning to his place of origin he will be able to access the past he so desires: ‘En ce jour de mon retour [...] je mélange tout en m’enfonçant dans ma sieste: mon enfance, les rues en

⁶⁷ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 18.

⁶⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l’état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p. 217.

⁶⁹ Christopher Wise, ‘Saying “yes” to Africa: Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*’, *Research in African Literatures*, 33 (2002), 124-42 (p. 132).

⁷⁰ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 14.

escalier de mon quartier à la Casbah'.⁷¹ 'L'essentiel', he remarks, 'sera d'aller retrouver le quartier d'enfance: voici enfin le jour du véritable retour'.⁷² The return to the space of the Casbah is conceived as a return to an authentic *temps d'origine*, for as Boym explains, 'At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams'.⁷³ Berkane's imaginary return to the Casbah of his mind can thus be read as a form of escapism from the problems and disillusion of the present, and certainly Berkane spends much time in a kind of juvenile reverie: 'je m'éloigne, je me perds dans cette première enfance'.⁷⁴ Furthermore, he tends to conceive the present through the lens of his childhood. Upon returning to Algeria he realizes that the reason he was so captivated by Marise's performance on stage in Paris was because it transported him back to the Casbah: 'À présent, je sais pourquoi la magie opérait en moi: ma mémoire obscurcie trouvait là, dans ce recueillement de tous, un reflet des soirées du cinéma Nedjma, à la Casbah!...'.⁷⁵ Marise thus comes to substitute for the loss of Berkane's childhood or place of origins, a substitution which, as will become clear, is but one of many.

After much rumination, Berkane's return to his native land eventually leads to the Casbah. In a letter to Marise he writes that his 'impatience à aller retrouver "[s]on" quartier est visible',⁷⁶ self-confidently contending, 'je ne viens ni en étranger ni en touriste attardé', despite his twenty years spent in exile.⁷⁷ The narrator remarks how 'tant de fois dans l'exil,

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷² Ibid., p. 53.

⁷³ Boym, p. xv.

⁷⁴ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 43.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

ensuite, il s'est imaginé que le microcosme de cet univers passé garderait à jamais sa réalité', and initially, Berkane attempts to locate and claim the Casbah as his own immutable space.⁷⁸

je fixe goulûment la tache triangulaire de "ma" montagne, de ma ville "pomme de pin", de ma Casbah, mon antre, ma forteresse, mon quartier, *houma*, resté le même grâce à la permanence des pierres, des maisons à terrasses, des rues d'ombre et des escaliers [...] ce village de montagne perché haut, vers la mer et ses tempêtes s'inclinant, ma Casbah j'y retourne, j'y reviens pour revivre [...] je suis ici...⁷⁹

Berkane's employment of the pronoun *my* verges on the neurotic, underscoring how little control he yields over the actual, tangible space of the Casbah as opposed to the mythical, almost Edenic place he has constructed in his mind. Indeed, he refers to the Casbah as his 'royaume d'autrefois',⁸⁰ giving expression to the manner in which the 'unrepresentable loss, painful as it may be, is [thus] transformed by nostalgic recollection into a beautiful form'.⁸¹ By visually 'fixing' the landscape as he does, and by documenting it and demarcating it into subsections over which he momentarily presides, Berkane attempts to reconcile the constructed simulacra with reality. The Casbah is constructed as a domesticated object of knowledge that can be mapped and known, parodying French colonial attempts to chart and manage the land, as well as the Orientalist fascination with knowing its other. Rendered in his maternal language, it becomes Berkane's *houma*, a familiar and 'homely' space to which he believes he can return unproblematically after twenty years. Just like the French colonists before him, however, Berkane inevitably fails to 'know' the space of the Casbah, and the satire of the Orientalist gaze ironically anticipates his inability to access his place of origin.

Even as he begins to return to the space that he calls home, it begins to present itself as distinctly *unheimlich*. Delayed in traffic on the edge of the Casbah, he is caught in a

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 64.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

⁸¹ Jonathan Steinward, 'The Future of Nostalgia in Friedrich Schlegel's Gender Theory: Casting German Aesthetics Beyond Ancient Greece and Modern Europe', in *Narratives of Nostalgia, Gender and Nationalism*, ed. by Jean Pickering and Suzanne Kehde (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 9-29 (p. 10).

subterfuge by youths who work in tandem to try and steal his camera, first by slashing his tyres and then by throwing gas into his vehicle. His image of himself as a native returning home is destabilized further when his friend Amar remarks, 'Ils t'ont pris pour un coopérant, ou un riche touriste!'.⁸² When he does finally reach the heart of the Casbah, he finds that old markers have since disappeared and he is unable to navigate his way through its labyrinthine structures. The nostalgic image he held of his homeland gives way to a vision of dilapidation and deprivation, mirroring the rapid breakdown of a society that, in 1991, was about to erupt into widespread violence. Berkane finds an unrecognizable, unhomely place 'marqué par une dégradation funeste'⁸³ that cannot be reconciled with his memories of the past: 'Maisons entre des zones d'éboulis, vieilles demeures en ruine et ces ruines commencent à dormir sous des détritrus, pyramides parfois incontournables de déchets et de fiente'.⁸⁴ The familiar and domesticated space that Berkane has constructed gives way to what Janet Sorenson, in her discussion of nostalgia, terms 'an alternative, double space that speaks the same language but inverts it into the unfamiliar and frightening'.⁸⁵ His shock at coming face to face with the reality of the Casbah in ruins corresponds to Boym's assertion that for the reflective nostalgic, it is often the case that:

the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has just been renovated and gentrified beyond recognition. This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives [nostalgics] *to tell their story*, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future.⁸⁶

Similarly, Berkane attempts to surmount this second, more profound exile from his beloved Casbah by writing to Marise:

⁸² Djebbar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 59.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁸⁵ Sorenson, p. 46.

⁸⁶ Boym, p. 50 (my emphasis).

Je tente de relater, pour toi, mon délaissement par rapport à mes lieux d'origine [...] je n'ai pas retrouvé ces lieux d'une vie autrefois foisonnante, grouillante, je les ai cherchés, je ne les ai pas encore trouvés alors que je t'écris!⁸⁷

In an essay entitled 'L'Écriture de l'expatriation' Djébar writes of the 'hantise, [et] l'obsession de la terre brutalement quittée, s'exprimant à travers les textes d'écrivains en fuites'.⁸⁸ The loss of the homeland is experienced as a rupture that is partially alleviated through the process of writing or marking loss. In *La Disparition de la langue française*, however, it is noticeable that Berkane's writing becomes much more prolific only after he has experienced the exile of repatriation. The loss of the nostalgic space of the Casbah is altogether more violent than its original loss through exile in Paris.

For Berkane, the Casbah becomes a 'non-space': 'ils se sont mués quasiment en non-lieux de vie, en aires d'abandon et de dénuement, en un espace marqué par une dégradation funeste!'.⁸⁹ This description of the Casbah gives expression to 'the uncanny as empty space, the terror of non-being and non-signification and the Freudian *unheimlich* and uncovering of the hidden'.⁹⁰ The shock arising from the discrepancy between the past and the present leads to an ontological gap that threatens Berkane's very identity, particularly since the Casbah stands in for his formative childhood years. His trauma demonstrates, in the words of Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone:

how closely memory is tied to place, and how many of its monuments of disjuncture and complexity are associated with changes in a place, registering the uncanniness of being at once the same and different, at once time and space.⁹¹

In a recent discussion of *La Disparition de la langue française*, Béatrice Schuchardt reads the *non-lieu* of the Casbah through the Deleuzian concept of the 'interstice':

⁸⁷ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 65.

⁸⁸ Djébar, *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*, p. 204.

⁸⁹ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 66.

⁹⁰ David Kennedy, 'The Beyond of the Subject—Mourning, Desire and the Uncanny', *Textual Practice*, 23 (2009), 581-98 (p. 588).

⁹¹ Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, 'Introduction: Contested Pasts', in *Contested Pasts: the Politics of Memory*, ed. by Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-21 (p. 11).

le concept du “non-lieu” explicitement mentionné par le texte, [est un] concept interstitiel allant de pair avec un sentiment de nostalgie qui se voit soudain transformé en deuil, né de la prise de conscience de la perte des lieux de mémoire.⁹²

Furthermore, she contends, ‘J’entends par la notion d’“interstice” non pas le simple écart temporel, mais un seuil infranchissable entre deux dimensions incompatibles, l’imaginaire de la mémoire et la perception actuelle’.⁹³ The interstice cannot be negotiated or bridged and the temporal realms remain in constant tension with one another.⁹⁴ This conflict between Berkane’s nostalgic, ghostly image of the Casbah and the reality of its present form suggests that there can be little dialogue between the different temporalities; this is certainly the case when the ghosts of Berkane’s past return to the present, or indeed when he returns to them. He imposes the structures of the past upon the present, losing himself in endless nostalgia.

For Schuchardt, the loss that arises when the nostalgic space meets with reality gives way to a form of mourning, but if the nostalgic is unwilling to renounce the lost object, as in Berkane’s case, such loss inevitably leads to melancholia: ‘Je suis définitivement en perte’.⁹⁵ As Cristina Boidard Boisson suggests, ‘la Casbah est définitivement la métonymie de l’Algérie contemporaine déliquescence, cruelle et symbole de l’impossible retour’.⁹⁶ Despite this deception, however, Berkane’s melancholia leads him to seek the Casbah elsewhere. Most notably, he finds in Nadja, his Algerian lover, a fleeting substitute for the city-scape,

⁹² Béatrice Schuchardt, ‘Manifestations d’une esthétique interstitielle dans *La Disparition de la langue française* d’Assia Djébar’, in *Assia Djébar, littérature et transmission*, ed. by Wolfgang Asholt, Mireille Calle-Gruber and Dominique Combe (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010), pp. 365-82 (p. 375).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁹⁴ Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer conceive a similarly insurmountable tension or ‘interstice’ between nostalgic memory and traumatic memory: ‘*Nostalgic* memory clashes with *negative* and *traumatic* memory, and produces *ambivalence*. In the act of return, that ambivalence is generative not so much of corrective narrative as of a kind of performance, the creation of a scenario that can hold both sides of the past simultaneously in view, without necessarily reconciling them, or “healing” the rift’ (p. 84).

⁹⁵ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 67.

⁹⁶ Cristina Boidard Boisson, ‘*La Disparition de la langue française* d’Assia Djébar: le mirage de l’impossible retour?’, in *Assia Djébar*, ed. by Najib Redouane and Yvette Bénayoun-Szmidt (Paris: Harmattan, 2008), pp. 301-19 (p. 309).

and it is no coincidence that he maps her naked body in much the same way as he does the Casbah: ‘Toi, ma Casbah retrouvée’, he writes of her.⁹⁷ It is ironic, however, that he writes of finding Nadjia at the very moment when she too is irrevocably lost to him. Knowing that she will leave for Italy, Berkane anticipates her spectral absence, writing ‘tu es la passante, tu deviendras mon fantôme’.⁹⁸ Having lost Nadjia, he then seeks to recover the Casbah of his youth through an autobiographical journal entitled ‘L’adolescent’, using writing as a means of resuscitating the lost past. When an object is lost and not mourned or worked through, suggests LaCapra, this can lead to an infinite series of deferred desires in which the object or a surrogate is sought:

In terms of loss or lack the object of desire is specified: to recover the lost or lacking object or some substitute for it. [...]. Especially with respect to elusive or phantasmatic objects, desire may be limitless and open to an infinite series of displacements in quest of a surrogate for what has presumably been lost. Moreover, desire may give way to melancholic nostalgia in the *recherche du temps perdu*.⁹⁹

Berkane’s search for his Edenic, childhood paradise is inevitably elusive since it derives from a nostalgic vision that cannot be recuperated. His desire to locate his nostalgic origins cannot be satiated, and leads inexorably to a desperate attempt to foreclose loss. What follows is a succession of object displacements and substitutions that lead to the protagonist’s isolation from social and political reality.

À la recherche de l’objet perdu

Just as ‘Berkane’s memories seem to take the form of a chain’, so he tends to either replace one lost object with another, or conflate several losses at once.¹⁰⁰ While in exile in France, he

⁹⁷ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 135.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁹⁹ LaCapra, ‘Trauma, Absence, Loss’, p. 708.

¹⁰⁰ Jenny Murray, *Remembering the (Post) Colonial Self: Memory and Identity in the Novels of Assia Djébar* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 208.

experiences both the loss of his mother, and the concomitant loss of his *mère patrie*. In returning to the motherland, then, he appears to enact a return to his lost mother. As Michael O’Riley suggests, he returns to his coastal town like ‘a fetus returned to a womb’.¹⁰¹ The motherland becomes increasingly confused with the imago, and this is particularly apparent through Berkane’s fixation upon both his mother and the maternal sea or ‘embryonic fluid’ in which he regularly bathes.¹⁰² Indeed, the opening section of *La Disparition de la langue française* is replete with references to both his *mère* and *la mer* as Berkane’s narrative moves discursively from one subject to another, often blurring the boundary between his mother, who represents his primary attachment to the motherland, and the sea which becomes the locus of his return. The following sentence, for instance, directly precedes his discussion of his spectral conversations with his dead mother, and thus hints at her ghostly murmurings: ‘il reconnut, incertain d’abord, puis sûr de lui, les murmures de la mer du temps où il était petit garçon’.¹⁰³ As Ernstpeter Ruhe suggests, ‘ce n’est pas par hasard si Berkane s’est installé au bord même de la mer et aime s’y baigner: l’eau est un symbole du féminin, comme la pierre l’est du masculin’.¹⁰⁴ The *mer* stands in for its near homonym *mère*, evoking Berkane’s sense of loss and desire to return to his origins. The figure of the mother is also a metaphor for the mother tongue, and Berkane’s return to Algeria marks an attempt to rediscover the lost Arabic language of his youth, the *langue maternelle* that he begins to employ again with his Algerian lover Nadjia: ‘De retour, soupiré-je dans la langue de ma mère’.¹⁰⁵ It is no coincidence that Berkane’s return is framed through the feminine, then, because his return to origins marks an

¹⁰¹ Michael F. O’Riley, *Postcolonial Haunting and Victimization: Assia Djébar’s New Novels* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 91.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁰³ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁴ Ernstpeter Ruhe, ‘Écrire est une route à ouvrir’, in *Assia Djébar: Nomade entre les murs*, ed. by Mireille Calle-Gruber (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2005), pp. 53-65 (pp. 56-57).

¹⁰⁵ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 14.

attempt to return to his ‘royaume d’autrefois’.¹⁰⁶ His internal image of Algeria corresponds to the mythological paradise of Arcadia, which ‘existed at a time when the “female principle” was valued, along with matriarchy, Mother Earth, and the Great Goddess’.¹⁰⁷

Berkane’s melancholia also stems from the loss of his French lover Marise, for whom he becomes increasingly nostalgic: ‘Je dis, pour toi et pour que tu le lises, ma nostalgie—*el-ouehch*—de toi’.¹⁰⁸ His nostalgia for Marise, however, becomes interconnected with his nostalgia for his mother and the Casbah; he writes to Marise of ‘La nostalgie de ta voix, de nos propos, de nos dialogues de la nuit, de ton corps [...] mais aussi mes mots d’enfant, ceux de ma mère’.¹⁰⁹ He describes Marise’s body using the maternal language of his mother, also writing, ‘tu ne comprends rien à ce babillage arabe que j’adresse à ta peau, à tes seins, à ton entrejambe, j’invente des diminutifs pour toi, jusque dans la langue maternelle’.¹¹⁰ He also invokes the sea in reference to Marise, contending, ‘En même temps, mon désir de toi devient marée haute dans cette absence voulue et pourtant si lourde...’.¹¹¹ Berkane thus employs the language of desire in relation to the sexualized image of the high tide, marking an ambivalent sexual correlation between himself, Marise, and his mother. Elsewhere, he describes the incorporated imago as emitting ‘un long soupir presque rauque, voluptueux,’ an image which is replete with sexual overtones.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁰⁷ Parita Mukta and David Hardiman, ‘The Political Ecology of Nostalgia’, *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism*, 11 (2000), 113-33 (p. 113). See also Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 59. Felski argues that ‘nostalgia is conventionally associated with femininity, the home, and a longing for maternal plenitude’.

¹⁰⁸ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 16.

Ana De Medeiros similarly remarks that ‘Berkane also seems to identify himself with his mother (and/or as his mother’s child) in a sexual way’.¹¹³ This is particularly evident in the following passage in which a series of object displacements and substitutions occur as the return to the lost homeland is eclipsed, along with the lost *mer/mère*, by Berkane’s sexual desire for Marise, ‘l’absente’:¹¹⁴

ayant oublié et mon retour, et surtout *la mer* au-dehors, à moitié réveillé, alors une *faim* sexuelle, vorace, me secoue, ton corps blanc ivoire se présente, ton nom s’éclaire: *Marise-Marlyse*, ce double prénom amène lentement le calme de mes sens, moi, un mâle tarauté par une si longue chasteté, puis la conscience réaffleurée, celle de *mon retour au pays* me saisit.¹¹⁵

The reference to the ‘mer’ evokes Berkane’s lost *mère*, just as the ‘faim sexuelle’ might be read in terms of its near homonym, *femme sexuelle*. Indeed, the ‘mèr(e)’ is replaced by the sexualized image of Marise-Marlyse, whose own phantomogenic doubling implicitly underscores her role as a substitutive love-object. Both ‘la mer’ and ‘[la] faim’ can, moreover, be read as ‘fantomogènes’ that conceal the lost object from view, thus thwarting any process of introjection that might lead to the forgetting or exorcism of the lost object.¹¹⁶ ‘[L]es mots “fantomogènes”, travesties en allosèmes’ are, according to Abraham and Torok, cryptophoric terms which are released by the parent-phantom: ‘[ils] peuvent être agis ou énoncés dans des phobies de toutes sortes, dans la phobie d’impulsion, dans des obsessions, des fantasmagories circonscrites ou envahissant la totalité des activités mentales du sujet’.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, they suggest, ‘Dans tous les cas, ces mots ont pour effet de défaire le système de liaison que, selon le mode œdipien, la libido tente vraiment d’instituer’.¹¹⁸ When *mère* is transmuted as its

¹¹³ Ana De Medeiros, ‘The Language of Exile: Haunting Desires in Djébar’s *La Disparition de la langue française*’, in *Exile Cultures, Mislplaced Identities*, ed. by Paul Allatson and Jo McCormick (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 139-50 (p. 148).

¹¹⁴ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 32.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22 (my emphasis).

¹¹⁶ Abraham and Torok, p. 432.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

homonym *mer* and *femme* is rendered simply as *faim*, the loss of the mother becomes concealed by the loss and imaginative recovery of Marise-Marlyse. However, Marise is then displaced yet again as Berkane's focus returns to his 'retour au pays'.

Berkane's melancholia thus stems from a series of losses which, though distinct from each other, become increasingly conflated: 'Le quatrième ou cinquième soir, il ne savait plus si c'était vraiment sa mère ou la voix de Marise [...] qui l'accompagnait jusqu'au cœur de sa nuit'.¹¹⁹ The loss of Marise becomes almost interchangeable with the loss of the mother, and she operates in many ways as a substitute maternal love object. In *Soleil noir: dépression et mélancolie*, Julia Kristeva writes of the way in which one form of loss tends to stand in for or conceal another, suggesting that the primal loss of the mother at birth incites an attempt to recover the mother or a surrogate love object:

L'enfant roi devient irrémédiablement triste avant de proférer ses premiers mots: c'est d'être séparé sans retour désespérément de sa mère qui le décide à essayer de la retrouver, ainsi que les autres objets d'amour, dans son imagination d'abord, dans les mots ensuite.¹²⁰

For Kristeva, the originary loss of the mother is alleviated either through language or the imagination and it is possible to read Berkane's melancholic diary entries as attempts to relocate the lost mother, in both the Oedipal sense and in terms of her real death. His Algerian lover Nadjia comes to stand in for many losses, the first of which is Marise, who figures less and less in Berkane's ruminations. References to both *la mer* and his *mère* also become increasingly less frequent, and Berkane even admits of his nights with Nadjia that, 'L'amour, l'écriture: je les expérimente, chaque nuit. Parfois, je n'entends plus la mer'.¹²¹ Indeed, while his relationship with Nadjia is primarily sexual, she represents a kind of generic, familial substitute for the female form: 'j'ajoute, sans savoir pourquoi, mais avec l'accent exact de

¹¹⁹ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 18.

¹²⁰ Kristeva, *Soleil noir: dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 15.

¹²¹ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 135.

mon dialecte maternel: Ô ma sœur (*ya khti!*)'.¹²² It is through the maternal language and through the return to the female body that Berkane attempts to relocate the lost (mother)land.

Problematizing a Politics of Melancholia

La Disparition de la langue française thus demonstrates how the search for a lost object or place of origin can ensnare the individual in a perpetual and debilitating search for an ideal which can no longer be located or, in the case of structural loss, perhaps never existed to be begin with. Berkane's infinite search for his lost mother(land) and the locus of his childhood isolates him from society and blinds him to the worsening political situation in Algeria. He barely acknowledges the upcoming general elections in Algeria, despite the fact that his return to his homeland coincides with this crucial moment in Algerian history. It is instead Nadjia who attempts to discuss the political tensions with Berkane:

Tu vis en ermite, comme dans un désert. As-tu réalisé que tout près de toi, le pays est devenu un volcan: les fous de Dieu, ou plutôt les nouveaux Barbares s'agitent, occupent des places publiques, mobilisent les jeunes chômeurs, et surtout, surtout, maîtrisent les nouveaux médias... Tu sais, j'ai l'impression qu'ils vont gagner les élections!¹²³

Nadjia's informed and passionate attempts to engage Berkane in the politics of the present come to no avail, however. When she describes the misogynistic diatribe she suffered at the hands of an Islamist taxi driver, Berkane refuses to respond to her argument, simply remarking instead, 'J'attendais, amusé, devant la conteuse qui mimait la scène, en continuant son récit'.¹²⁴ Berkane also contends, 'Je me suis dressé; j'ai regardé la mer, une seconde. Cette petite bonne femme, si désirable et qui me parlait comme dans un meeting d'étudiants!'.¹²⁵ Berkane adopts a patriarchal tone that undermines Nadjia's reading of the

¹²² Ibid., p. 110.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 116.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 120.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 117.

political crisis, choosing instead to gaze distractedly at the *mer*. Ironically, he fails to realize how his paternalistic gaze parodies that of the very Islamists he disregards, whose radical subordination of women was coming to a head. Indeed, the FLN's promulgation of the Family Code of 1984, which saw the revocation of women's basic rights, 'was viewed by many as a concession to Islamic fundamentalists who were then becoming politically assertive'.¹²⁶ Ignorant of his own implication in the socio-political devaluation of women, he objectifies Nadjia and mocks her involvement in politics.

While he cannot be coaxed into a debate on current issues, however, he soon becomes impassioned by a return to the distant past: 'Plus tard, ce même jour, ce fut moi qui, à brûle-pourpoint, plongeai dans un passé plus lointain'.¹²⁷ Rather than concern himself with the rise of fundamentalism, he immerses himself in the writing, and the very time of, his autobiography: 'J'ai commencé "L'adolescent" la nuit dernière. Je vis désormais en décembre 60, puis en 61...'.¹²⁸ His writing project remains highly individualistic, demonstrating how personal memory can be isolating and fragmentary, even bordering on the narcissistic:

Le pays vit une révolution: un traumatisme, un coup d'État? [...]. Moi, je vis, pour mon propre compte, ma révolution minuscule, ce qui requiert toute mon énergie: "L'adolescent" se met à vivre devant moi. Il bouge, irréel mais fantôme proche.¹²⁹

Notably, Walder suggests that without a certain level of self-reflexivity, 'the tendency towards narcissistic nostalgia may dominate—a tendency all the more likely in postcolonial discursive contexts'.¹³⁰ In *La Disparition de la langue française*, Berkane's self-absorbed nostalgia is in many ways related to his inability to reconcile memories of the colonial past with the reality of the postcolonial present; it is an inability which has deadly consequences as

¹²⁶ John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: the Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 282.

¹²⁷ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 120.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-33.

¹³⁰ Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, p. 14.

his narrative terminates abruptly, and Djébar's text 'concludes' with its final section: *la disparition* of the novel's protagonist. The few details surrounding Berkane's disappearance are assembled through the narrative of his brother Driss, and we learn that on a visit to locate his former prison, Berkane simply vanished and there is 'toujours rien, pas de corps, pas de traces ravisseurs'.¹³¹ His car is found abandoned by the roadside and it is presumed that he has been murdered by religious fundamentalists.

By foregrounding the way in which 'son retour [...] était devenu une disparition', Djébar problematizes the idea that one can return to and recover the past.¹³² Given her insistence upon the importance of memory work to the future of postcolonial Algeria, it is troubling that a return to the past is so transparently associated with death and paralysis. It is important, however, to differentiate between a type of memory work that informs our understanding of the future and one which keeps us ensnared within the limiting framework of the past. In a discussion of the use and role of memory, Tzvetan Todorov argues:

pour moi, il n'existe pas de devoir de mémoire tout court. Cela ne veut pas dire, je m'empresse de le dire, qu'il y aurait un devoir d'oubli. Pas du tout. La mémoire est nécessaire, mais il faudrait ajouter aussitôt: "en vue de faire quoi?" C'est la raison pour laquelle j'aime bien l'intitulé de notre émission, qui est "Du bon usage de la mémoire": il présuppose que tous les usages ne sont pas bons.¹³³

Just like Rachel in Boualem Sansal's novel *Le Village de l'Allemand*, the form of Berkane's retrospective gaze blinds him to the present. Rather than identify how (memories of) events in the past have shaped and informed the escalating violence and oppression of the 1990s, Berkane centres instead upon certain historical moments, isolating them from other temporalities and political loci. As the Holocaust historian Charles Maier compellingly argues in relation to the recent memory boom, the 'fault is not with memory, but with our current

¹³¹ Djébar, *La Disparition de la langue française*, p. 198.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 196.

¹³³ Alain Finkielkraut, Richard Marienstras, and Tzvetan Todorov, *Du bon usage de la mémoire* (Tricorne: Geneva, 2000), pp. 12-13.

balance of past and future'.¹³⁴ For Maier, the 'surfeit of memory is a sign not of historical confidence but of a retreat from transformative politics'.¹³⁵ The fixation upon memory, he suggests, is a symptom of political hiatus and marks a lack of confidence in the present and the future rather than a genuine investment in the past. 'I do not crave a wallowing in bathetic memory', he writes, 'I believe that when we turn to memory it should be to retrieve the object of memory, not just to enjoy the sweetness of melancholy. And I am not certain that any memory can retrieve the past'.¹³⁶

In *La Disparition de la langue française*, Berkane does not even seek to retrieve the past, if by that one means transporting it into the present; rather, he attempts to return to a place in time that can never be (re)located. Unlike Maier, he revels in the bathos of memory and turns away from political engagement. Djébar leaves his disappearance open to interpretation, and it is probable that he has been assassinated by Islamic fundamentalists. Nonetheless, his disappearance also points to Djébar's critique of a form of nostalgic or melancholic memory that lends itself to immobilization rather than active engagement with the present. By returning to the space of his incarceration, Berkane is transformed into a victim of his own debilitating retrospection, echoing Maier's fear that memory is today ensconced within a politics of 'victimhood' that 'cathects to landscape and territory' rather than 'constitutions, legislation and widening attribute of citizenship'.¹³⁷ The problem, then, is not memory itself, suggests Djébar, but an obsessive form of melancholic memory based on victimhood that forecloses change and discounts the present. Berkane's self-referential,

¹³⁴ Charles Maier, 'A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy, and Denial', in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 442-45, (p. 444).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

reflective nostalgia blinds him to the critical issue of the present, that is, to the *restorative* nostalgia giving credence to the religious fundamentalism of the FIS.

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PART TWO

CHAPTER FIVE

Detective Fiction and ‘Working Upon’: Investigating the (Post) Colonial Past in Boualem Sansal’s *Le Serment des barbares* (1999) and Yasmina Khadra’s *La Part du mort* (2004)

Les retrouvailles de mémoire sont tout à fait positives. Elles permettent de regarder l’histoire en face, de pouvoir l’écrire, mais elles sont aussi révélatrices de problèmes. Le risque existe d’une apparition de mémoire communautarisée, où chacun regarde l’histoire de l’Algérie à travers son vécu, son appartenance familiale. Ce regard particulier ne permet pas le “métissage” des mémoires pour éviter que l’histoire ne se rejoue.

*Benjamin Stora*¹

A critical analysis of the postcolonial novels of Assia Djébar, Yasmina Khadra, and Boualem Sansal problematizes the ethico-political usefulness of melancholia. If today melancholia is predominantly celebrated as an ethical mnemonic model, the recent texts of Djébar and Sansal portray it as a barrier to an ethics of remembrance. It is tied up with narcissism and the self-referential appropriation of the lost other as well as being linked to existential victimhood and the usurpation of the victim subject-position. What is more, if melancholia is connected to silence, apolitical retrospection, and the perpetuation of the status quo, in Khadra’s novel *À quoi rêvent les loups* it also emerges as a model of conservatism, feeding into the mythologized narratives of return posited by the *Front Islamique du Salut*. The recent fiction of Djébar, Khadra, and Sansal thus signals the need for different modes of working upon the past that transcend the limitations of the Freudian binary of mourning and melancholia. This chapter thus explores how the detective novels of Khadra and Sansal operate as a form of

¹ Benjamin Stora, ‘La Mémoire retrouvée de la guerre d’Algérie’, *Le Monde*, 19 February 2002 <www.idh-toulon.net/spip.php?article529> [accessed 5 June 2012] (para. 19 of 21)

working upon the past, that is, as a consciously engaged and on-going form of memorialization.

Detective fiction is typically concerned with issues of death, truth, justice, and resolution and thus it figures as a useful point of departure for exploring emergent modes of working upon the traumas of Algerian history.² And if psychoanalytical theory and detective fiction have overlapped since Freudian psychoanalysis was popularized in the first half of the twentieth century,³ today the ‘psychoanalytical project’ remains ‘haunted by its previous configuration in detective fiction’.⁴ Indeed, psychoanalysis has always gestured towards the structure of the detective novel and it is widely known that Freud was an avid reader of Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes* mysteries.⁵ Originally, at least, both discourses sought to uncover and decode discursive clues—whether unconscious or tangible—in order to situate them within a larger framework that might engender symbolic closure.⁶ Typically, in both detective fiction and psychoanalysis, the suturing of disparate referents and the translation of codes led to the revelation of a hidden truth. As Patrick French puts it, both ‘inevitably end up

² Jean-Christophe Delmeule has stressed the importance of the trope of death to Khadra’s œuvre at large. See Jean-Christophe Delmeule, ‘La mort dans la littérature contemporaine algérienne: Yasmina Khadra, Aziz Chouaki, Boualem Sansal, Amin Zaoui’, in *La mort dans les littératures africaines contemporaines*, ed. by Louis Bertin Amougou (Paris: Harmattan, 2009), pp. 60-75 (p. 67).

³ See Sjeff Houppermans, ‘Psychanalyse et Littérature: pour une discipline moderniste’, *Relief*, 4 (2010), 1-10.

⁴ Patrick French, ‘Open Letter to Detectives and Psychoanalysts: Analysis and Reading’, in *The Art of Detective Fiction*, ed. by Warren Chernaik and others (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 222-32 (p. 223).

⁵ Todd Dufresne, *Against Freud: Critics Talk Back* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 81.; Alexander N. Howe, ‘The Detective and the Analyst: Truth, Knowledge, and Psychoanalysis in the Hard-Boiled Fiction of Raymond Chandler’, *Clues*, 24.4 (2006), n.pag. (para. 5 of 32). Freud himself explicitly articulated his indebtedness to detective fiction, employing the language of the genre to elucidate and develop his own theory. In an address to law students at the University of Vienna in 1906, for instance, he remarked that in ‘both [psychology and law] we are concerned with a secret, with something hidden’. He then argued that ‘[Psychoanalysts] have to uncover the hidden psychical material; and in order to do this we have invented a number of detective devices, some of which it seems that you gentlemen of the law are now about to copy from us’. See Sigmund Freud, ‘Psycho-Analysis and the Establishment of the Facts in Legal Proceedings’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IX (1906-1908): Jensen’s ‘Gradiva’ and Other Works* ed. by James Strachey, (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 97-114, (p. 107).

⁶ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 270.

posing a semantic core, a truth, the *meaning* of discourses'.⁷ This truth is attained via a meticulous excursion into the past, conceptualized by Freud as a form of archaeology. He famously argued that the 'psychoanalyst, like the archaeologist, must uncover layer after layer of the patient's psyche, before coming to the deepest, most valuable treasures'.⁸ The mind is conceived as a timeworn, almost primeval crypt in which repressed memories, deposited deep below the surface, must be excavated and analysed along a spatio-linear trajectory.⁹ Psychoanalysis, defined by Paul Ricœur as a revelation of the archaic, is thus informed by the belated return to the past that structures detective narratives and archaeology.¹⁰ And if the so-called 'talking cure' seeks to rehabilitate the subject and to re-establish the self as a putatively whole, rather than fragmentary, being, Heta Pyrhönen similarly argues that 'detective fiction explicitly savors the *narrative* nature of the explanatory process. After all, in this genre, reaching a solution means the ability to put together a more or less coherently and plausibly emplotted account of past events: the solution equals narrative'.¹¹ The hidden truth thus emerges as elements are pieced together in a teleological manner.

If detective fiction originally served as a medium of conservatism, purging society of its criminal elements and restoring social order,¹² the genre has since been deployed to critique normative paradigms. Particularly in the aftermath of 1968 and its discontents, the *néo-polar* emerged in France as a critical voice, shifting the detective's gaze away from

⁷ ffrench, p. 222.

⁸ Sergius Pankejeff, *The Wolf-Man by the Wolf-Man*, ed. by Muriel Gardiner (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p. 139.

⁹ Howe, (para. 7).

¹⁰ Paul Ricœur, *De l'interprétation: essai sur Freud* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), p. 444-46.

¹¹ Heta Pyrhönen, *Mayhem and Murder: Narrative and Moral Problems in the Detective Story* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 26.

¹² John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 46; Fedwa Malti-Douglas, 'The Classical Arabic Detective', *Arabica*, 35 (1988), 55-91 (p. 84).

individual crimes to an interrogation of social, historical, and political contexts.¹³ While the identification of trauma has always formed the basis of psychology, French also perceives a recent shift in detective fiction, whereby the focus is on the emergence of a traumatic event rather than on the emergence of a particular truth: ‘Psychoanalysis seems to have become a hidden or acknowledged subtext for the detective, who is now not so much in search of the truth of the crime he or she is investigating, as in search of the truth or trauma of a past, often his or her own past’.¹⁴ If, in some narratives, the trauma in question is examined through a protagonist’s individualized experience of the event, detective novels increasingly map out complex socio-political and historical configurations, often revealing how large-scale traumas have been suppressed by the authorities. David Fraser, for instance, asserts that the “private” detective has become a sort of “public eye”, casting his investigative gaze into the shadows of official history in order to reveal a “new” truth about power and memory’.¹⁵ The traumas (and large-scale crimes) investigated by the detectives in the *néo-polar* are firmly ensconced within a particular historical context, allowing for an interrogation of the social practices and ideologies that allowed them to occur. If ‘[q]uestions of narrative and history are written into the very fabric of crime fiction’,¹⁶ authors exploit the detective genre in order to elicit traumatic histories and memories that have been partially erased or which persist as absent

¹³ Claire Gorrara, ‘French Crime Fiction: From *genre mineur* to *patrimoine culturel*’, *French Studies*, 61 (2007), 209-14 (p. 209). See also Claudia Canu, ‘Le Polar maghrébin sous la plume de Yasmina Khadra: Comment l’enquête policière devient enquête politique’, *Belphégor*, 9 (2010), n. pag.

¹⁴ French, p. 225. See for example Julia Kristeva, *Le Vieil homme et les loups* (Paris: Fayard, 1991). Kristeva’s detective novel was written in response to the assassination of her father in a Bulgarian hospital.

¹⁵ David Fraser, ‘Polarcauste: Law, Justice and the Shoah in French Detective Fiction’, *International Journal of Law and Context*, 1 (2005), 237-59 (p. 243).

¹⁶ Claire Gorrara, ‘Reflections on Crime and Punishment: Memories of the Holocaust in Recent French Crime Fiction’, *Yale French Studies*, 108 (2005), 131-45 (p. 134).

presences, often re-situating them within a transnational perspective that forges new ethical and historiographical understandings of the past and its relation to the present.¹⁷

Critics have also recognized new forms of postcolonial detective fiction that share many of the features of the *néo-polar*. Ed Christian, in *The Post-Colonial Detective*, for instance, places emphasis upon ‘the way detectives frequently proceed from the interrogation of suspects to the interrogation of society. Individual crime comes to be seen as a symptom of, result of, or reaction to basic flaws in the political, social, and industrial systems’.¹⁸ Similarly, the editors of *Postcolonial Postmortems* argue that in postcolonial detective fiction ‘the social order is no longer restored, but questioned through alternative notions of justice’.¹⁹ This politically aware subset of detective fiction tends to eschew any form of closure that might lend itself to totalizing frames of reference or indeed to the forgetting of past crimes, seeking to challenge the status quo rather than impose a new one. This lack of closure also speaks, of course, to the unresolved nature of many of the socio-political contexts which inform the narratives, suggesting, also, that working upon the past is an interminable project.²⁰ The recent detective novels of Boualem Sansal and Yasmina Khadra can be located at the intersection of the French *néo-polar* and emergent forms of postcolonial detective fiction. Both authors exploit the genre to investigate the haunting legacy of the Algerian War and to critique the official memory put forth by the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN). Building

¹⁷ See Max Silverman, ‘Interconnected Histories: Holocaust and Empire in the Cultural Imaginary’, *French Studies*, 62 (2008), 417-28 (p. 420). The detective fiction of Didier Daeninckx, for instance, has centred upon the emergence of seemingly disparate yet interconnected histories that produce links between the histories of French decolonization and France’s role in the Holocaust.

¹⁸ Ed Christian, ‘Introducing the Post-Colonial Detective: Putting Marginality to Work’, in *The Post-Colonial Detective*, ed. by Ed Christian (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 1-16 (p. 2).

¹⁹ Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen, ‘Postcolonial Postmortems: Issues and Perspectives’, in *Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective*, ed. by Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 1-16 (p. 5). See also Adrienne Johnson Gosselin, ‘Multicultural Detective Fiction: Murder with a Message’, in *Multicultural Detective Fiction: Murder from the “Other” Side*, ed. by Adrienne Johnson Gosselin (New York: Garland, 1999), pp. 3-14.

²⁰ See Shelley Godsland, ‘Crimes Present, Motives Past: a Function of National History in Contemporary Spanish Detective Novels’, *Clues*, 24.3 (2006), (n. pag.) (para. 22 of 22).

on the legacy of the *néo polar*, they reject palliatives and narrative closure in favour of a model of memorialization that seeks to open up historical interconnections rather than reduce them to the kind of homogenous narratives typical of nationalist discourse. In their tireless examination of the connections between the war of independence and the civil war, the novels unveil, I venture, a critical model of working upon the past that is, in part, a blueprint for remembering. In other words, Sansal and Khadra invariably place less emphasis on *what* is unearthed than they do on *how* the information is elicited, ultimately encouraging the reader to continue the difficult process of working upon the past long after the final page has been turned.²¹

Postcolonial Algeria's Memory Wars

Both Mireille Rosello and Dominick LaCapra have sought to identify narratological forms that might initiate a process of working upon the past. In her analysis Rosello invokes the French detective series *P.J. Saint Martin*, arguing that one of the programmes figures the relationship between Algeria and France in such a way that 'the complicated weave of memorial threads [...] can no longer be reduced to a mosaic of narratives that each emanate, supposedly monolithically, from a given community'.²² This description might well be applied to Sansal's novel *Le Serment des barbares*, set in the Algerian town of Rouiba during the Algerian civil war. The narrative is instigated by the deaths of Mohammed Lekbir, a fraudulent entrepreneur known locally as Si Moh, and Abdallah Bakour, a local man who tends to the mausoleum of the *pied-noir* Villetta family in the town's European cemetery.

²¹ If I employ the term 'working through' in this chapter, this is because it is the term utilized by the theorists in question. While I favour the phrase 'working upon' for its suggestion that remembrance is an on-going task, for fluidity's sake I will use the terminology of the theorists when citing their work.

²² Mireille Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives: Works of Mourning in Progress* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 187.

While Abdallah is found dead in his abode with his throat slit, Si Moh is discovered by his family in his bureau, having been shot six times in the chest, and then twice from above, before being stabbed in the heart. Given the violence of the Islamic extremists, his assassination is immediately attributed to religious *barbus*. Conversely, the subaltern figure of Abdallah is deemed, in the words of Judith Butler, ‘ungrievable’, and his case is only pursued because the novel’s detective Si Larbi operates according to a personal code of ethics.²³

Though Rouiba’s police force is eager to assign the case to the archives, Larbi remains convinced that the untimely deaths of Moh and Abdallah are interconnected. His unrelenting search for the nexus between them thus propels the narrative. Empirical clues lead him to the realization that the solution to the crimes cannot be identified in the present, but must be sought in Algeria’s past. By reinterpreting the significance of Moh’s wounds, for instance, he comprehends that the assassination occurred ‘dans une discrétion bourgeoise, avec un sang-froid impie’²⁴ that runs counter to the theatrical ‘spectacle de la mort’ of Islamist violence.²⁵ Contending that, ‘Si le présent ne dit rien, interroger le passé est la voie’,²⁶ Larbi’s search for the motive behind Moh’s death propels him towards ‘[u]ne histoire qui commence en 1955, en pleine guerre d’Algérie’.²⁷ The narrative thus operates according to an anti-linear trajectory that moves from the civil war back to the originary trauma: the war of independence.

In *La Part du mort*, set in the late 1980s just as socio-economic unrest is beginning to transmute into violence, Brahim Llob’s criminal investigation is instigated by the presidential release of SNP (*Sans nom patronymique*) from an asylum. SNP’s subsequent attempt to murder Haj Thorbane who, like Si Moh, is a corrupt yet dominant figure within the upper

²³ Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 35.

²⁴ Boualem Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), pp. 378-79.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

echelons of Algerian society, triggers an investigation into Thorbane's past, ultimately implicating him in the FLN's massacre of the *harkis* following the Evian Accords of 1962. The original detective narrative is thus subsumed within a larger historical inquiry: 'Nous travaillons sur un ouvrage historique [...]. Particulièrement sur les dérapages qui ont ensanglanté le pays au lendemain du 5 juillet 62'.²⁸ As in Sansal's narrative, certain clues can only be interpreted by situating them within a larger historical framework, echoing LaCapra's view that:

working through, as it relates [...] to the elaboration of a critical historiography, requires the effort to achieve critical distance on experience through a comparison of experiences and through a reconstruction of larger contexts that help to inform and perhaps to transform experience.²⁹

Working upon the past thus marks an attempt to expand upon historical or memorial narratives in order to gain different perspectives on the past that question and modify dominant or homogenous accounts of history. In *La Part du mort*, for instance, Llob discovers that one of his witnesses, Tarek Zoubir, has been hanged and his nose has been cut off:

En Algérie, le nez est l'organe de la fierté. Durant la guerre d'indépendance, les maquisards tranchaient le nez de ceux qu'ils considéraient comme félons avant de les faire défiler dans les rues pour que les gens en tirent les enseignements qui s'imposent. La signature et le message étaient clairs, à l'époque. C'est de les voir resurgir vingt-six ans après qui me tarabuste.³⁰

This symbolic act of violence re-emerges mimetically as an anachronistic trace from the war of independence and, although its significance within the present remains unclear, knowledge of the past enables Llob to historicize his investigation. Critical to an understanding of the present is thus what Larbi refers to as the 'facteur clé, la dimension historique qui assemble les faits et leur donne empennage et motricité'.³¹

²⁸ Yasmina Khadra, *Le Quatuor algérien: les enquêtes du commissaire Llob* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), p. 271.

²⁹ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 200.

³⁰ Khadra, *Le Quatuor algérien*, p. 303.

³¹ Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, p. 448.

The connections between historiography and working through outlined by LaCapra and Rosello are developed throughout the detective fiction of Sansal and Khadra. Llob's investigation into SNP's past is facilitated by Soria Karadach, a historian of the war of independence, while Si Larbi's chief interlocutor is a historian named Hamidi, revealing the centrality of emergent histories to the authors' literary projects.³² According to Theodor Adorno's Freudian analysis of working through, historical accountability, coupled with a critical knowledge of the past, is the only way to transcend repetitive cycles of violence: 'The past will have been worked through only when the causes of what happened have been eliminated. Only because the causes continue to exist does the captivating spell of the past remain to this day unbroken'.³³ The unconscious elements of history must be identified, as Soria similarly argues in *La Part du mort*:

Il est grand temps de faire le deuil de cette guerre [...]. La seule façon d'y parvenir est de la regarder droit dans les yeux. Le mal a été fait. Pour le conjurer, il faut l'admettre d'abord. [...]. Nous avons un devoir de mémoire à accomplir.³⁴

The verb *conjurer* connotes a form of psychological exorcism that gestures towards Adorno's conception of breaking the 'captivating spell of the past'. As with Adorno's thesis on the origins of National Socialism, it is the causes—*le mal*—which must be exorcized in order to limit their haunting influence upon the present. Conversely, a critical form of memory must emerge from this rupture with the violent origins of the horrors of the past, and this is depicted as an ethical *devoir de mémoire*.

³² See Beate Burtscher-Bechter, 'Vision et réalité de l'intellectuel chez Yasmina Khadra', in *Diversité littéraire en Algérie*, ed. by Najib Redouane (Paris: Harmattan, 2009), pp. 171-87 (pp. 176-77). Burtscher-Bechter argues that, 'se manifeste également la forte conscience historique qui caractérise les intellectuels dans les romans de Khadra. Ils s'avèrent tous être gardiens des traditions et médiateurs entre le passé et le présent, des médiateurs qui, avec fermeté, avertissent leurs compatriotes de ne pas tourner le dos au passé et de ne pas effacer des parties de l'histoire'.

³³ Theodor Adorno, 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past', in *Can One Live after Auschwitz?: a Philosophical Reader*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and trans. by Rodney Livingstone and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 3-18 (p. 18).

³⁴ Khadra, *Le Quatuor algérien* p. 271.

Both Sansal and Khadra trace the violence of the civil war back to the war of independence: ‘La guerre d’Algérie, commencée il y a quarante ans, se poursuit et va vers un terrible dénouement. L’histoire se venge’.³⁵ Through his investigations, Larbi generates a ‘théorie sur le retour en scène des seigneurs de la guerre ou de leurs successeurs’ that establishes connections between the FLN and the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS).³⁶ Larbi’s investigations reveal, moreover, that Si Moh and Abdallah were childhood friends and that, together with Moh’s criminal counterparts, Zerbib and Aoudia, they fought on behalf of Messali Hadj’s *Parti du peuple algérien* (PPA) and the later *Mouvement national algérien* (MNA). Abdallah, horrified by the arbitrary violence of some of the MNA’s combatants, fled the *maquis* to spend the duration of the war as a labourer for the *pied-noir* Villetta family, who possessed a vast amount of land near Rouiba. After the termination of the Algerian War, Abdallah emigrated with his patrons to Toulouse and, on his return to Algeria in 1990, spent his days attending to their family’s graves in the European cemetery.

The cemetery, redolent of the discursive and contentious connections between mourning, memorialization, and official memory in postcolonial Algeria, becomes the locus of the nation’s melancholic relationship to its past. As Larbi’s investigation continues, the cemetery increasingly marks the nexus between haunting memories of the Algerian War and the recent Islamic fundamentalism, symbolizing the way in which divergent memories and ideologies vie for authority: ‘Depuis longtemps, [Larbi] se doutait que les cimetières chrétiens, et pas seulement celui de Rouiba, étaient au cœur d’une vaste affaire [...] [qui] mêlent la politique, la religion, la drogue’.³⁷ Larbi’s inquiry reveals that Moh, Aoudia, and Zerbib never relinquished their ties to the Messalist faction. Driven by a desire for revenge

³⁵ Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, p. 271.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

and domination, they orchestrated a scheme that ‘[p]eu à peu, [...] men[ait] à la guerre civile’.³⁸ In order to bolster its strength and to gain additional support, the neo-Messalist movement appealed to the nostalgia of the *pieds-noirs* in France by presenting them with images of their abandoned mausoleums: ‘Dans une première étape, accentuer la peine des pieds-noirs en leur montrant, photos à l’appui, l’état calamiteux de leurs cimetières et raviver leur haine du bicot’.³⁹ Moh’s appeal to the nostalgia of the *pieds-noirs* reflects the social reality of a group that, in Benjamin Stora’s terms, ‘ont tout de même le sentiment d’être abandonnés. Un peu comme s’ils étaient à l’identique, dans un temps arrêté, dans l’année 1962-1963, comme s’il n’y avait pas de franchissement de temporalité’.⁴⁰ Believing themselves to have been unlawfully exiled from their homeland, the melancholic *pieds-noirs* prove susceptible to Si Moh’s manipulation of their forebears’ graves: ‘ils sont partis avec les racines aux pieds et la tête bruissante de projets de retour’.⁴¹ The *pieds-noirs*’ melancholy for the lost homeland enables the anti-FLN movement to enlist them in its attempts to destabilize Algeria, since, as Larbi articulates, ‘[à] un homme qui a mal à son passé, on peut proposer n’importe quel avenir, pourvu qu’il y ait la nostalgie et un plan de ressourcement à la clé’.⁴²

Nostalgia for a putative lost plenitude is apparent in both the *pieds-noirs*’ desire to return to an idealized colonial past and the Islamists’ crusade for a new religious state. It has been viewed as a form of ‘consolidation for a lost power’⁴³ and certainly the *nostalgérie*⁴⁴ of

³⁸ Ibid., p. 434.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 436.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Stora, ‘Guerre d’Algérie: entre enfermement et refus du deuil’, <<http://www.univ-paris13.fr/benjaminstora/articlesrecents/269-guerre-dalgerie-entre-enfermement-et-refus-du-deuil-par-benjamin-stora-intervention-au-colloque-l-langage-violence-r-organise-par-lassociation-primolevi-17-juin-2011->> [accessed 23 April 2012] (para. 11 of 24).

⁴¹ Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, p. 438.

⁴² Ibid., p. 437.

⁴³ Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase, *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 3.

the *pieds-noirs* is often associated with right-wing politics and the French *loi du 23 février 2005* which,⁴⁵ according to Stora, marked ‘le retour de la guerre des mémoires, des deux côtés de la Méditerranée, et la mise à l’écart de la voix historienne’.⁴⁶ The detective novels of Sansal and Khadra can be read as an attempt to reintegrate historicity—in the form of a critical mode of working upon the past—into French and Algerian narratives of the war of independence. Both authors elicit the *guerre des mémoires* surrounding the conflict, but in doing so they seek to dismantle the rigid distinctions between groups, revealing how their aims and ideologies overlap.⁴⁷ In *Le Serment des barbares* Larbi thus emphasizes how the relationship between the *pieds-noirs* and the Messalists signals a nexus of political alliances that persist long after the termination of the war:

Ils ont renoué les fils avec leurs alliés d’hier, en France, dans les milieux pieds-noirs de l’extrême droite et dans les ghettos harkis. Après tout, durant les années de braise, n’ont-ils pas lutté contre le même ennemi, le FLN? N’ont-ils pas été également trahis par l’armée française et les politicards de Paris?⁴⁸

Si Moh’s faction appeals to a complex historical web of nostalgia, former hostilities, and partisan politics that have yet to be publicly addressed in Algeria. Si Moh and the neo-Messalists are portrayed as fuelling and exploiting the increasing socio-political problems faced by the population during the 1980s, wilfully inciting religious fundamentalism,

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l’autre, ou, La prothèse d’origine* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p. 86. See also Fiona Barclay, *Writing Postcolonial France: Haunting, Literature, and the Maghreb* (MD, Lanham: Lexington, 2011), p. xxxiii. Barclay argues that ‘for groups such as *pieds noirs* activists, the aim is not the laying to rest of the specter, since the ghosts of the past are all that remains of a motherland forever lost to them. Their experience is one of unresolved mourning, a mourning which cannot be resolved because to do so would be to abandon the injustices committed by the French State at the conclusion of the Algerian War in 1962, for which adequate acknowledgement and reparations have not been forthcoming’.

⁴⁵ Kate Marsh, ‘Introduction: Territorial Loss and the Construction of French Colonial Identities’, in *France’s Lost Empires: Fragmentation, Nostalgia, and la Fracture Coloniale*, ed. by Kate Marsh and Nicola Frith (Lanham, Md: Lexington, 2011), pp. 1-13 (p. 7).

⁴⁶ Stora, ‘Guerre d’Algérie’, (para. 21 of 24).

⁴⁷ See Benjamin Stora and Thierry Leclère, *La Guerre des mémoires: La France face à son passé colonial* (La Tour d’Aigues: L’Aube, 2007)

⁴⁸ Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, p. 435.

described as ‘une drogue bon marché’,⁴⁹ in order to establish ‘une armée de féroces assassins: les islamistes’.⁵⁰ Prosperous capitalists like Moh in *Le Serment des barbares* and Haj Thorbane in *La Part du mort* are shown to have profited from the civil war, amassing ‘des fortunes flamboyantes’ while attempting to destabilize the FLN.⁵¹ Sansal thus troubles the legitimacy of their on-going ties to the Messalists, suggesting that the Messalist legacy offers individuals like Moh a socio-political guise under which to seek personal gain. The civil war, like the war of independence before it, remains an ambiguous conflict whose actors cannot easily be classified according to the Manichean paradigms that structure conventional detective fiction.

Investigative Practices and ‘Working Upon’

The memorial threads that emerge throughout the novels are frequently re-examined by the detectives as their investigations unearth new clues from the past. In many ways, the texts proffer a model of working upon that is akin to Rosello’s notion of working through as an act of translation, in which ‘each translation or retranslation adds, to the original formulation, a layer of metaphors or examples that indicate that the practice of memorializing is not a goal in itself’.⁵² Similarly, in the detective narratives, each new piece of evidence or testimonial emerges tangentially, constructing a mnemonic palimpsest that, like working upon, is never complete, but relentlessly self-questioning and critical. Just as the process of working upon resists finitude and catharsis, the novels eschew any form of closure, refusing to endorse yet another monocausal interpretation of the past that would merely echo the homogeneity of the

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 434.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 434.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 434.

⁵² Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 18.

FLN's discourse. The '*jouissance*' typically associated with the reader's search for '*meaning*' in detective fiction is absent from these texts and, in contrast to the aims of both conventional detective fiction and psychoanalysis—in particular the work of mourning—they place emphasis on processes of questioning rather than end results.⁵³

Many of Larbi's theories thus remain at the level of conjecture and the motive behind Abdallah's death remains ambiguous throughout: 'Il savait quelque chose, on l'a tué, ce n'est pas nouveau', suggests Larbi, though it is unclear precisely what he knew.⁵⁴ It is possible Abdallah had discovered that Moh and his 'brothers' had been storing drugs and weaponry in the European cemetery, or else his careful maintenance of the Villettas' tombs threatened to controvert the degenerative images of the dead *colons*' resting place; perhaps, too, his death was revenge for having deserted the Messalists during the war. 'Le pauvre [inspecteur] s'inventait treize questions à la douzaine',⁵⁵ articulates the narrator, an ambiguity that persists towards the end of the narrative: 'Avec des intuitions il avait élaboré une théorie et aucun des éléments rassemblés par lui n'était venu la démentir; ni formellement la valider'.⁵⁶ Larbi never succeeds in revealing his hypothesis to Hamidi, let alone in testifying in a court of law; his investigation remains unresolved, thwarted by Algeria's corrupt socio-political climate. Similarly, in *La Part du mort*, Llob's investigations do not resolve many of the complexities of the case. Certain clues convince him that Haj Thorbane's ultimate death is not suicide as presumed, but he fails to bring the killer to justice. Likewise, while the narrative reveals how many of Algeria's elite exploited the Algerian War to gain power and capital, Llob cannot hold them accountable: Ché, an immoral *maquisard* from the *guerre d'Algérie*, remains

⁵³ ffrench, p. 222.

⁵⁴ Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, p. 412.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 368.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 423

impervious to the law, and Ghali Saad, a corrupt bureaucrat who works for the investigation unit, is unlikely to be arrested despite perverting the course of justice and manipulating the police investigation.

In a startling twist, *Le Serment des barbares* even terminates with the murder of Larbi in an Algiers café, just as he is on the verge of articulating his hypotheses to Hamidi. His death can be read as the corollary of his subversive enquiries: he understands, too late, that the corrupt police force is likely implicated in the murders of Si Moh and Abdallah and he remembers, somewhat fearfully, how ‘[il] avait traîné ses soupçons partout’.⁵⁷ At the same time, his assassin is described as having ‘deux yeux fous’, a reference to the zealous *barbus*, though the novel implies, of course, a relationship between the two.⁵⁸ In a striking parallel, in *L’Automne des chimères*, the concluding novel of Khadra’s detective series, Inspector Llob is killed in similar circumstances, yet another victim of ‘la tragédie algérienne’ that is performed mimetically on a quotidian level.⁵⁹ By killing off their detectives, Sansal and Khadra acknowledge the reality of a situation in which corruption, extremism, and criminality reign supreme. At the same time, however, their deaths also suggest that trauma cannot be facily or fully surmounted and thus, as LaCapra rightly acknowledges, acting out often constitutes part of the process of working through. Envisaging a narrative form that accounts for this, LaCapra ventures that:

the nonfetishistic narrative that resists ideology would involve an active acknowledgement and to some extent an acting out of trauma [...] and it would indicate its own implication in repetitive processes it cannot entirely transcend.⁶⁰

By beginning and ending their detective narratives with the trope of death, Khadra and Sansal situate their protagonists within historical modes of acting out. This highlights that working

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 450.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 458.

⁵⁹ Khadra, *Le Quatuor algérien*, p. 918.

⁶⁰ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 199.

upon the past is not a straightforward remedy to traumatic histories, suggesting too that it takes more than just the efforts of one individual. The deaths can thus be read as a figurative call to arms that implicate the reader in the task of working upon the past, inciting him or her to continue where Larbi and Llob left off.

If the deaths of the detectives risk undermining their authors' attempts to work upon the violence of Algeria's history, then, it is important to note that in denying the *jouissance* often attributed to detective fiction, Sansal and Khadra do not critique the investigative practices of their protagonists but rather the political context in which they operate. The lack of any Hollywood denouement should not be read as a methodological failure but rather as the product of a particular socio-historical climate. The detectives' relentless self-questioning and their desire to keep working upon the past becomes their legacy. Solving the facts of the case thus becomes secondary to the larger impetus of Khadra and Sansal's narrative projects, that is, the establishment of an ethical mode of historical engagement that seeks interconnections and hidden traces: 'Ce n'est pas le résultat de l'investigation policière qui l'intéresse [Larbi], c'est ce qu'elle ne peut atteindre et révéler'.⁶¹ The frame of reference expands throughout the narratives, opening up new histories and thus, as Claudia Canu writes of Khadra's detective series, 'nous avons l'impression d'assister au tissage d'une immense toile où chaque fil se noue dans un dessin beaucoup plus vaste'.⁶² As the narratives pose more questions than they are able to answer, they foreground a self-critical approach to historiography akin to LaCapra's tentative definition of 'Working-through [as a process which] implies the possibility of judgment that is not apodictic or ad hominem but argumentative, self-

⁶¹ Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, p. 432.

⁶² Canu, para. 23.

questioning, and related in mediated ways to action'.⁶³ Larbi's self-questioning discourse is clearly connected to action, and it is also a sign that he is open to multiple and aporetic interpretations of the past that circumvent the return-to-origins narrative typical, in differing ways, of both Algerian identity politics and the genre of crime fiction.⁶⁴

Far from seeking a linear truth or a narrative that might bolster a particular victim subject-position, the texts postulate that working upon is an on-going, expansive practice that enables new ways of interpreting the past. As liminal figures within their communities, Larbi and Llob do not represent any particular faction. What is edifying about their enquiries is not the ideological position from which they originate, but their willingness to work upon all aspects of the *guerre d'Algérie*. Importantly, both detectives are former anticolonial fighters whose conceptions of the past are modified by their discoveries: '[Larbi] était touché dans ses illusions. Il avait en tête une vision de l'histoire un peu moins dégueulasse, un peu plus héroïque'.⁶⁵ Through their investigations of Algeria's past, the detectives thus begin to achieve the level of critical distance that, in LaCapra's view, is vital to working through.⁶⁶ By investigating the insidious elements of Algeria's history, the narratives also enact what Sansal, in his polemical essay *Poste restante*, deems necessary if the nation is to transcend the melancholic repetition of the past, namely, 'la réécriture de l'Histoire en insistant sur ses points négatifs'.⁶⁷ In *Le Serment des barbares*, for example, Larbi uncovers the intra-tribal conflicts that led to mass executions, deploring the 'FLN [qui] a armé le bras de nos jeunes pour les jeter dans le feu du sacrifice'.⁶⁸ The deaths of the young fighters are shown to have

⁶³ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 210.

⁶⁴ Marion François, 'Le Stéréotype dans le roman policier', *Cahiers de narratologie*, 17 (2009), n.pag. (para. 22 of 41).

⁶⁵ Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, pp. 358-59.

⁶⁶ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 200.

⁶⁷ Sansal, *Poste restante, Alger: lettre de colère et d'espoir à mes compatriotes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), p. 58.

⁶⁸ Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, p. 356.

been machinated by the FLN in order to induce fear and deference amongst the Algerian people. In *La Part du mort*, Llob also critiques the FLN by revealing how figures such as Haj Thorbane joined the *maquis* on the eve of independence when victory was assured. His unearthing of the massacre of the *harkis* in the summer of 1962 also serves to undermine the FLN's claim to legitimacy, inviting further critique of Algeria's obscured and complex past.⁶⁹

Working Upon the Victim-Perpetrator Binary

In *History and Memory after Auschwitz* LaCapra articulates that, 'Any politics limited to witnessing, memory, mourning dead victims, and honoring survivorship would constitute an excessively limited horizon of action, however desirable and necessary these activities may be'.⁷⁰ A mnemonic model devoted purely to memorialization might engender the victimhood that fuels dualistic thinking since mourning frequently commemorates historical loss by affirming, and thus perpetuating, the same binary distinctions—us and them, victim and perpetrator—that marked the original conflict. This form of commemoration is particularly dangerous in the context of postcolonial Algeria, a nation whose dominant narrative is still predicated upon the colonizer-colonized paradigm.⁷¹ More recently, of course, the narratives of other groups, including *harkis*, *pieds-noirs*, and Messalists, have emerged to counter the FLN's appropriation of the victim subject-position; yet, as *Le Serment des barbares* demonstrates, these narratives have fuelled a politics of victimhood.

Precisely because the past is not being worked upon—at least in any official capacity—in postcolonial Algeria, various permutations of the victim-perpetrator dialectic

⁶⁹ As Barclay contends, 'the conduct and fate of the *harkis* [...] [remains] one of the most shameful aspects of the Algerian war, and, to date, one of the least acknowledged and addressed' (p. xxiv).

⁷⁰ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 198.

⁷¹ See Sansal, *Poste restante*, p. 42.

continue to structure society. Stora, as we have seen, figures the civil war as a gross parody of the war of independence, with putatively new groups mimetically re-enacting the anticolonial war under the guise of the past: ‘les islamistes’ are critical of ‘les nouveaux pieds-noirs,’ while the FIS are accused of being “‘harkis’ voulant casser la nation algérienne’.⁷² Interpreted in this way, the civil war becomes a macabre game in which participants act out their violent roles according to a predetermined set of rules. *Le Serment des barbares* also references the ‘protagonistes [qui] attendent leur tour d’entrer en scène’,⁷³ similarly figuring the Manichean space of Rouiba as the site of an absurdist game that will replicate ad infinitum unless established patterns of violence are dealt with: ‘À Rouiba, on déteste que la victime manque à son bourreau, on refuse qu’elle perce son jeu’.⁷⁴ As a microcosm of Algerian society, the situation in Rouiba points to the need to work upon the victim-perpetrator binary in order to break free from the haunting logic of the past. Transcending the limitations of the victim-perpetrator dyad is regarded by LaCapra as a vital component of working through.⁷⁵ He is careful to stress, however, that ‘deconstructing the opposition [...] between perpetrator and victim should not remain within a strategy of reversal, which leads to the automatic valorization of the supposedly suppressed member of the pair’.⁷⁶ Processes of working upon must recognize that the ontological and social concept of the victim is not created in a vacuum; it necessarily arises in relation to an ‘other’, a perpetrator, who is involved in the victim’s complex relationship to sentiments of loss, guilt, retribution, and forgiveness.

In terms of historical modes of working upon the past, moreover, I would caution that to construct narratives that seek to move beyond the victim-perpetrator binary is not to belie

⁷² Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de l’Algérie depuis indépendance* (Paris: La Découverte, 1994), p. 102.

⁷³ Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, p. 325.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷⁵ LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, p. 42.

⁷⁶ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, pp. 210-11.

the existence or suffering of victims, but rather to elicit communities that are no longer founded on, or constituted by, victimhood and the victim-perpetrator binary. Thus the detective novels of Sansal and Khadra do enact a form of justice on behalf of the dead. If, as Fraser affirms, the ‘law of the genre demands the quest for justice’,⁷⁷ both Llob and Larbi act out of an ethical desire to remember both the victims of the war of independence and ‘les nouvelles victimes du terrorisme’.⁷⁸ While Larbi is advised to abandon the case, he stoically refuses to forsake the dead: ‘L’accouchement du rapport l’avait tourmenté. Ses complices de l’administration voulaient le bourrer d’omissions sans laisser place à la vérité. Ses morts n’auraient pas compris. C’est exigeant, un mort en service commandé’.⁷⁹ Larbi is acutely aware that, like so many forgotten dead before him, Abdallah would likely be ascribed to what Ranjana Khanna refers to as ‘the garbage can of modern nationalism’:⁸⁰ ‘Bakour n’existe pas et, s’il a existé, c’est parce que vous et moi, sidi le jouge, nous nous intéressons à son assassin’.⁸¹ Through the detective format, Sansal attempts to rehabilitate the singular memory of Abdallah, and both authors exploit the way in which detective fiction encourages us to ‘listen again to the voices of the past’.⁸² The form of justice that is performed within the narratives is necessarily incomplete since, like Rosello and LaCapra, Khadra and Sansal accept that the past can never be ‘repaired’ or recovered.⁸³ Abdallah cannot return as a spectre to articulate the truth of his past any more than Larbi can construct a redemptive narrative from the fragmentary clues at his disposal. Indeed, if Abdallah’s life and death produce a

⁷⁷ Fraser, p. 254.

⁷⁸ *Le Serment des barbares*, p. 9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24.

⁸⁰ Khanna, ‘Post-Palliative: Coloniality’s Affective Dissonance’, *Postcolonial Text*, 2.1 (2006), n.pag. (para. 39 of 39).

⁸¹ Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, p. 164.

⁸² Jason David Hall, ‘Introduction: The Voices of the Past’, *Clues*, 25 (2007), 3-4 (p. 4).

⁸³ Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 24.

multitude of different hypotheses, this serves as a caveat warning against reductive attempts to interpret—and testify on behalf of—the dead.

Instead, as Larbi and Llob encounter different witnesses and penetrate different social arenas, their investigations engender what LaCapra terms a ‘comparison of experiences’ that begin to map out a more nuanced narrative of Algerian history.⁸⁴ In *La Part du mort*, the historian Soria Karadach instils in Llob the need to transcend the reductive categorization of individuals and groups according to the victim-perpetrator paradigm if a more candid and heterogeneous history of the country is to emerge:

D'accord, vous êtes un ancien maquisard et il vous est difficile de vous retenir face à vos ennemis d'hier, mais aujourd'hui nous sommes obligés de revenir sur des atrocités inimaginables et d'écouter et ceux qui les ont perpétrées et ceux qui les ont subies. Il ne s'agit pas de pardonner ou de condamner; il est question de reconstituer les faits afin d'en tirer les enseignements qui nous font défaut. Personnellement, avant de me jeter dans le bain, j'ai laissé mes préjugés au vestiaire afin d'aborder les événements avec cette dose d'objectivité sans laquelle aucun travail sérieux ne peut être possible.⁸⁵

In contrast to conventional detective fiction, in which a rigidly maintained distinction between victim and perpetrator operates as one of the genre's core organizing structures, apportioning blame or exculpation is not the aim of the narrative. Rather, in order to ‘break free’ of the repetitive cycle of violence, established biases and affiliations must be worked upon—and, in certain cases, even relinquished—so that Algerians from different groups can begin to reconnect as individuals.

In *La Part du mort* Khadra chooses to analyse the vilified ‘perpetrator’ figure of the *harki*, who has been condemned and even massacred on both sides of the Mediterranean for supporting French Algeria during the war of independence. Contrary to the notion that they were necessarily traitors in favour of colonialism, *La Part du mort* suggests that many *harkis* were not driven by an encoded or collective ideology, but were individuals forced to make a

⁸⁴ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, pp. 210-11.

⁸⁵ Khadra, *Le Quatuor algérien*, pp. 276-77.

precipitous decision during a time of socio-political turmoil. In other words, if figures such as Haj Thorbane made the ‘correct’ choice, literally banking on the FLN in order to prosper financially in the postcolonial era, some *harkis* joined the French military because it appeared the best alternative at the time. Indeed, for many individuals it might have seemed inconceivable that Algeria would gain independence, and thus the choice to fight on behalf of the French was a tactical rather than an ideologically motivated one. One of the witnesses in Llob’s case, a farmer and a former *harki*, explains the situation in the following terms:

C’est quoi un harki? S’indigne-t-il. C’est quoi au juste? Vas-y, éclaire-moi. C’est quoi un harki?... [...]. C’est quelqu’un qui, manque de pot, a fait le mauvais choix à un moment où rien ne lui réussissait. Voilà ce que c’est, un harki.⁸⁶

Khadra portrays the farmer as an individual whose decision to become a *harki* was based on particular circumstances that had little to do with the identity politics of war. What is more, the farmer reveals that he was castrated by the FLN, and thus it might be more appropriate to categorize him as a victim of the *guerre d’indépendance*. Notably, however, he rejects the victimhood position just as vehemently as he refutes the label of perpetrator, refusing to locate himself within a larger historical narrative predicated on limiting oppositions.

To memorialize the *harkis* according to a politics of melancholic victimhood, suggests Khadra, would be reductive for several reasons. By drawing attention to the farmer’s singularity, Khadra undermines the notion of a homogenous collective known as the *harkis*, suggesting that to speak of such a collectivity is as disingenuous as labelling Algeria a predominantly Arab nation. Furthermore, if the farmer were to engage in a politics of victimhood, this would mean repeatedly inhabiting and reliving the traumas of his past. Instead, while he remains physically and symbolically scarred by the war of independence, his sense of identity does not emerge in conjunction with the dominant narratives of the Algerian

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 273.

War. Thus while his isolated existence in rural Algeria might underscore the on-going risk of vigilante violence he still faces, it also points to his desire to inhabit a space in which identities are not fixed by postcolonial identity politics. Khadra's narrative does not so much deconstruct the victim-perpetrator binary, then, as suggest that such identities are much more ambiguous than many memorial narratives would admit.

Khadra does not simply subvert the image of the *harki*, thereby re-inscribing the nation's 'perpetrator' as a victim. Instead, *La Part du mort* deconstructs the very notion of a fixed *harki* identity, focusing instead on the farmer's innate 'human-ness', that is, his errors and weaknesses, as well as his strengths. This focus on the singularity of those who acted in the war of independence figures as a point of departure for an inter-subjective relationship with the other beyond the melancholic model of victimhood. Thus while the detectives in both novels begin by decoding the complexities of Algeria's past by reading the clues in accordance with specific roles, identities, and actors, their investigative processes also begin to dismantle what Sansal refers to as 'le jeu' of history by deconstructing the metanarratives of the war. As Llob and Larbi converse with divergent witnesses and suspects, they begin to map out a community of *individuals*. The identities within these emergent communities are not predetermined, but emerge as they articulate themselves within the public sphere.

This notion of memorialization as an on-going process of articulation is discussed in Michael Rothberg's monograph *Multidirectional Memory*. In an effort to move beyond the way in which memory often emerges according to a hierarchy of victimhood, Rothberg postulates the model of multidirectional memory.⁸⁷ If 'Victimization proves not to be the best grounds for solidarity since [...] it erode[s] the basis of selfhood necessary for a relationship

⁸⁷ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 2.

with others', multidirectional memory traces the interconnections between different memorial threads.⁸⁸ In many ways echoing LaCapra's conceptualization of working through as a model that engenders a 'hybridized' narrative,⁸⁹ multidirectional memory is 'subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing'.⁹⁰ The emphasis is not on how each group or individual fashions itself in contradistinction to the other, but on the entanglement between different communal memories, thus transcending what Rosello perceives to be the limitations of "counter-discursive" memorial paradigms'.⁹¹

In particular Rothberg's model of multidirectional memory pertains to the 'counterpublic' space, that is, an arena in which different discourses intersect.⁹² Importantly, the speaking subject is not fixed but is involved in a creative process of becoming as his or her testimony intersects with that of other individuals:

If neither the space nor the subject of public discourse is given in advance, then the testimonial articulation of memory becomes a site of potential political engagement; it creates subjects and helps shape what counts as the terrain of politics.⁹³

The model posited by Rothberg thus goes some way to resisting monolithic interpretations of history, though it is not without its shortcomings. Multidirectional memory is also potentially open to abuse by those who employ equivalences and similes rather than seeking crossovers and traces. In a similar vein, Rosello's conception of translation might lend itself to manipulation by ideologues who translate the past according to their own doctrines. Such is the case in *Le Serment des barbares* as Si Moh manipulates the past for his own ends. Importantly, however, Larbi recognizes this problem, contending, 'L'histoire a mille visages,

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 163.

⁸⁹ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 199.

⁹⁰ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 3.

⁹¹ Rosello, *The Reparative in Narratives*, p. 5.

⁹² Michael Rothberg, 'Between Auschwitz and Algeria: Multidirectional Memory and the Counterpublic Witness', *Critical Inquiry*, 33 (2006), 158-84 (p. 172). Rothberg takes his definition of the 'counterpublic' from Michael Warner's conception of public space and its relation to discourse.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 162.

chacun le voit comme il lui plaît'.⁹⁴ Although this danger cannot be circumvented altogether, the fact that it is recognized is a first step towards safeguarding against instrumentalization. And if, following Larbi's attempts to work upon the past, we remain sceptical of monolithic or ostensibly self-evident truths, then such discourse would, at the very least, be problematized as it arose.

If Sansal and Khadra do not provide a fully developed model of working upon the past, this is because to posit a totalizing methodology would undermine the critical aims of 'working upon'. Indeed, their detective novels suggest that working upon the past, as it pertains to larger historical configurations, is an interminable quest, not for a singular truth, but a series of truths that intersect, inform, and challenge one another. Disparate mnemonic and historical referents cannot be made into a totalizing whole because the past can never be fully recovered; instead, the on-going task is to reinterpret connections between different groups according to the emergence of new evidence, all the while realizing that these threads will never merge seamlessly into a coherent memorial narrative. Importantly, the multidirectional and pluralistic interpretations favoured by Sansal and Khadra proffer the beginnings of a form of working upon the past that eschews models of remembrance based on a politics of melancholic victimhood. If melancholia forecloses an engagement with the other, then working upon would, conversely, encourage the subject to be open to the way in which memory is continuously—and fundamentally—reconstituted by the other. And if melancholia encourages a retrospective preservation of the past, moreover, models of working upon would seek to re-contextualize the past in light of the present, thus circumventing a mode of remembrance that ignores, at its peril, the politics of the present. Most importantly, in refusing to proffer a finalized model of working upon, Sansal and Khadra encourage the reader to

⁹⁴ Sansal, *Le Serment des barbares*, p. 352.

develop his or her own approach, thus inspiring the critical modes of thinking that are vital to emergent mnemonic models. The legacy of their novels, then, is not the historical truths they lay bare but the notion that working upon the past is an interminable process that begins not with the transmission of knowledge, but with its critical reception.

CHAPTER SIX

Auto-analyse and Autofiction: Reworking the Self-Other Dyad in Assia Djébar's *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (2007)

Il y a mille façons de se voiler.¹
Assia Djébar

If Yasmina Khadra and Boualem Sansal deploy the structures of detective fiction in order to work upon the historiographical layers of Algerian history, Djébar's latest attempt to deal with the past is an altogether more private affair. Her 2007 text *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* returns in detail to her formative years in French Algeria, and has been described as 'her most overtly autobiographical narrative to date'.² In this text Djébar recounts her youth from childhood to adolescence, adopting a loosely chronological, confessional discourse that she refers to as 'auto-analyse'.³ Djébar revisits, in particular, the traumatic scene of her suicide attempt in Algiers when she was seventeen years old and, given her preoccupation with haunting and melancholia, particularly from the mid-nineties onwards, it is perhaps unsurprising that *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* has been interpreted as yet another postcolonial trauma novel to be juxtaposed alongside her recent 'spectropoétique'⁴ body of work.⁵ The so-called *roman* certainly bears the hallmarks of a genre that might loosely be

¹ Assia Djébar, *Ces voix qui m'assiègent: en marge de ma francophonie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999), p. 98.

² Jenny Murray, 'La mort inachevée': Writing, Remembering, and Forgetting in Assia Djébar's *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, *La Disparition de la langue française* and *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, in *Amnesia: Private and Public Memory in Modern French Culture* (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 71-83 (p. 71). See also Jane Hiddleston, 'The Mother as Other: Intimacy and Separation in the Maternal Memories of Assia Djébar's *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 11.2 (2011), 21-33 (p. 24).

³ Assia Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), pp. 107, 445, 424.

⁴ Jacques Derrida quoted in Névine El Nossery, *Témoignages fictionnels au féminin: une réécriture des blancs de la guerre civile algérienne* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), p. 88.

⁵ In 'La mort inachevée,' for instance, Murray analyses *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* as part of a triptych that includes *La Disparition de la langue française* and *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* and which centres on trauma. See Anne Donadey, 'L'expression littéraire de la transmission du traumatisme dans *La Femme sans sépulture* d'Assia Djébar', in *Assia Djébar: littérature et transmission*, ed. by Wolfgang Asholt, Mireille Calle-

termed trauma fiction, at times exhibiting literary manifestations of the traumatic condition that include looping, disavowal, unspeakability, and repetitive acting-out. Focusing upon these tropes, Anne Donadey thus emphasizes the dissemination of trauma within the novel, arguing that, ‘L’esthétique du détour qui permet l’expression littéraire du traumatisme, mentionnée par rapport à *La Femme sans sépulture*, est également visible dans *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*’.⁶ For Donadey, then, the text figures as an extension—both in terms of form and content—of the issues of mourning and memory addressed in Djébar’s 2002 narrative. As in *La Femme sans sépulture*, it is the cyclical structure of ‘le retour du refoulé’ evident in texts such as *La Disparition de la langue française* or *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, which, for Donadey at least, best characterizes the narratological structure of her latest narrative.⁷ In particular, she provides examples of how Djébar repeatedly invokes key terms associated with a traumatic event or where the narrator returns repeatedly to moments of trauma.⁸ While this is undoubtedly true—Djébar’s narrative does revisit certain traumatic scenes several times, frequently employing mimetic terminology to do so—I would suggest that this signals a conscious form of ‘working upon’ trauma that might lead to the (necessarily partial) containment of the traumatic condition.

It is in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* that Djébar begins to enact a new mode of remembrance that we might call ‘working upon’ the past. Thus while the text is a derivative of her recent corpus, in the sense that it builds upon critical issues emerging out of it, it also marks a shift in the author’s approach to loss and trauma. Ernstpeter Ruhe similarly argues

Gruber and Dominique Combe (Paris: Presses Sorbonne nouvelle, 2012) pp. 67-80. See also Ana De Medeiros, ‘Writing as Wounding and Healing in Assia Djébar’s *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*’, *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 15.2 (2012), 277-96.

⁶ Donadey, ‘L’expression littéraire’, p. 78.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

that the narrative represents ‘le premier pas dans un nouveau cercle qui ajoute un autre anneau à l’enchaînement des écritures djebariennes’,⁹ before contending that:

Nulle part dans la maison de mon père est donc bien à la fois “le premier pas” d’une nouvelle entreprise “autobiographique” et en même temps un pas de plus sur le long chemin déjà parcouru par une œuvre qui se construit à coups d’enjambements d’un livre à l’autre.¹⁰

Ruhe makes reference to the palimpsest-like quality of the Djebarian oeuvre, which is also evident throughout *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*. Just as autobiographical elements from previous texts re-emerge hauntingly within this latest narrative—most notably Djébar’s failed suicide which is treated, albeit in a very different manner, in *L’Amour, la fantasia*¹¹—the ghostly trace of *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, the text ‘à venir’,¹² to cite Jacques Derrida, was always already present.¹³ As early as 1995 Djébar alluded to the title of her latest fiction, writing of Mouloud Mammeri that, ‘Il habitait non loin de la maison de mon père’.¹⁴ By the time she wrote *La Femme sans sépulture* the references were altogether more explicit. At one point the narrator-analyst is overheard remarking, ‘Nulle part dans la maison de mon père’, which is figured as an ‘étrange plainte que l’étrangère, durcie, se chante pour elle-même’.¹⁵ Later on in the text the analyst figure asks herself: ‘Et toi? Quand serai-je vraiment de retour pour gravir le chemin qui monte au sommet de Césarée? Là où, sous mille couches

⁹ Ernstpeter Ruhe, ‘Enjambements et envols: Assia Djébar échographe’, in *Assia Djébar: littérature et transmission*, ed. by Wolfgang Asholt, Mireille Calle-Gruber and Dominique Combe (Paris: Presses Sorbonne nouvelle, 2012), pp. 37-53 (p. 38).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹¹ Assia Djébar, *L’Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995 [1985])

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Voyous: deux essais sur la raison* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), p. 10.

¹³ Writing about *La Femme sans sépulture*, Anne Donadey notes that ‘there is also the ghostly presence of Djébar’s own father in the text. Indeed, it is interesting to note that Djébar’s writing has been moving towards hauntology precisely since her father’s death in 1995 and it could be argued that his ghost haunts her 1995 narrative *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*’. My reading diverges from Donadey’s in the sense that I believe *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* figures a shift away from *hauntologie*. See Anne Donadey, ‘Introjection and Incorporation in Assia Djébar’s *La Femme sans sépulture*’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 48.4 (2008), 81-91 (p. 89).

¹⁴ Assia Djébar, *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 149.

¹⁵ Assia Djébar, *La Femme sans sépulture* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 87.

de ténèbres, dort désormais mon père, les yeux ouverts'.¹⁶ These references, located within the larger framework of Djébar's resurrection of Zoulikha's ghost, say something about the latency of traumatic memory; they also suggest, however, that Djébar's fictional writing has served to mask or veil her own personal traumas.

In a section on autobiography in *Ces voix qui m'assiègent* Djébar concedes that her 'architectures fictionnelles' in French have served to obscure her, arguing that 'dès le départ, la distance entre moi, femme, et ces architectures avait été maintenue avec une volonté délibérée. Je me dis à présent que j'écrivais tout en restant voilée'.¹⁷ This suggests not only that Djébar's more candidly fictional texts and characters have veiled her own history, but also that her autobiographical works have too. While such an assertion might appear paradoxical, it is something that Djébar returns to in her latest narrative: 'Les livres, les fictions, les théories, les épopées [...] seulement à t'assoupir, à te faire fuir dans les fumées de l'imaginaire, à te dissoudre [...] seulement à dormir...'.¹⁸ Literature has operated as a form of escapism or flight—a recurrent motif in Djébar's corpus—from her own traumatic past. In February 2007, in a speech delivered to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Djébar confirms this, venturing that:

Depuis au moins 20 ans [...] dans mon travail d'écriture sur la mémoire visuelle du Maghreb, comme pareillement en littérature, j'ai compris que l'occulté, l'oublié de mon groupe d'origine, devait être ramené à la clarté, précisément dans la langue française. Dans cette langue, dite de l'autre, je me trouvais habitée d'un devoir de mémoire, d'une exigence de réminiscences d'un passé mort arabo-berbère, le mien.¹⁹

While the possessive pronoun *mien* can be understood in this context as referring to the plural history of Algeria, in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* there can be little doubt that the

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 243.

¹⁷ Djébar, *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*, p. 97.

¹⁸ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 426.

¹⁹ Assia Djébar quoted in Nora Sari, 'Le dernier roman d'Assia Djébar *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*', in *Le Quotidien Oran*, January 2008. <<http://www.dziriya.net/culturdz/article.php?p=189&title=le-dernier-roman-d-assia-djébar-%ABnulle-part-dans-la-maison-de-mon-père%BB>> [accessed 21 February 2011] (para. 2 of 40).

hidden story to which Djébar returns is indeed her own. Towards the end of the narrative, she asserts:

Oublie: le père vrai, le faux fiancé, les témoins, la mère aimée du père, oublie les autres, mais pas toi-même! Les mots t'ont perdu, les langues mortes t'ont enterrée, les momies depuis longtemps sont exposées à l'encan, même plus protégées ni vénérées: tu te faisais roide au-dehors, bouillonnante en secret, et tous tes romans, tes poèmes, tes paroles de solitaire, séchées sur le papier, ne furent que des remèdes dérisoires, fuites qui ne s'avouent pas.²⁰

Djébar alludes to the traumas she has experienced, attesting to the fact that her own losses have been subsumed and buried beneath the dead language of others (both the French language and the history of others, such as her father and her fiancé Tarik). This linguistic and mnemonic effacement of the self has merely served as a false palliative, however, as the traumas of the past remain a seething presence. Most surprising, however, particularly given Djébar's sustained attentiveness to the figure of the other, is her self-referential entreaty to 'forget the others' but not herself. Such a self-oriented venture appears at first to be incompatible with Djébar's wider ethical project, representing as it does a marked shift from the resurrection of the spectral figure in texts such as *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* and *La Femme sans sépulture*. Yet, as will become clear, it is precisely this return to the self enacted in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* that engenders the possibility of a new relationality between the self and the (lost) other.

Autofiction and Working Upon

Much criticism of *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* has figured the text as a trauma novel, yet this is to overlook its autofictional qualities. Trauma novels, as we have seen, are often paradoxically figured as the genre par excellence of an ethics of memory, whereas autofiction is frequently critiqued as unethical and self-oriented: 'Impudique, narcissique,

²⁰ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, pp. 426-27.

thérapeutique, immorale, voilà ce qu'on entend lorsqu'on parle d'autofiction'.²¹ This condemnation of autofiction is perhaps one of the reasons why critics often refer to Djébar's more self-referential narratives as 'autobiographies' rather than autofictions.²² Yet *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, if it must be categorized as a specific genre, would certainly be located beneath the heading of autofiction. This is not merely because autobiography is based on what Philippe Lejeune called a truth pact between author and audience whereas autofiction incorporates elements of fact and fiction²³—a putative distinction that Serge Doubrovsky, who coined the neologism autofiction, recently denounced as untenable²⁴—but that autofiction involves a reassessment of the past that is not always present in autobiography. In this sense, then, it has been claimed that 'l'autofiction [est] *le deuil romanesque de l'autobiographie*'.²⁵ According to Philippe Vilain, while autobiography involves 'la rétrospection factuelle d'un passé figé' that 'se retourne sur sa mémoire comme pour constater que du temps a passé', autofiction instead 'détourne sa mémoire'.²⁶ As Vilain goes on to venture, 'l'autofiction paraît bien s'écrire *après* l'autobiographie, et le sujet s'écrire *après* lui-même, non dans le souvenir de son histoire mais dans le ressouvenir qu'en donne sa post-histoire'.²⁷ The prefixes *de-* and *re-* thus attest to the various forms of reappraisal and self-analysis that constitute autofiction, which figure in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* as modes of working upon the past. As Djébar explains:

²¹ Philippe Vilain, *L'Autofiction en théorie, suivie de deux entretiens avec Philippe Sollers et Philippe Lejeune* (Chatou: Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2009), p. 110.

²² See for example Anne Donadey, *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001), p. 148.

²³ Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 45.

²⁴ Comments made by Serge Doubrovsky during his address entitled 'Autofiction: Story and History' at the *Conference on Autofiction*, New York University, 20 April 2012.

²⁵ Vilain, p. 41.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.42.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.42.

Il ne s'agit point ici d'autobiographie, c'est-à-dire d'un déroulé chronologique; justement, pas de chronologie ordonnée après coup! Ecrire; revivre par éclairs, pour approcher quel point de rupture, quel envol ou, à défaut, quelle chute?²⁸

Djebar alludes to the processes of rewriting and 'reliving' that occur throughout her autofictional narrative, focusing in particular on the fact that her story does not conform to a teleological or linear narrative of the self that would seek to entirely surmount the past.

Indeed, akin to Dominick LaCapra's notion of working through as a process that cannot facilely transcend trauma and its somatic manifestations, Djebar's narrative does not succeed in overcoming loss if, by that, we mean engaging in a process of Freudian mourning. Rather *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* centres around 'quatre scènes de pertes fondamentales':²⁹ the death of the idolized paternal grandmother who '[I]'a abandonnée';³⁰ the death of her younger brother; the author's suicide attempt in Algiers; and the figurative loss of both her father and fiancé in the final scene. At times memories do return belatedly to the present as if Djebar is acting out the episodes as a flashback: 'Ce trouble, ce trauma, le ressuscitant si tard'.³¹ She frequently emphasizes the latency of her memories—'Tout revient, si longtemps après'³²—and in the final scene she remarks, 'Ces mots refluent des décennies après... Tout doit resurgir, de cette durée qui se dissout inexorablement. Même trop tard!'.³³ That said, however, Djebar does not fetishize the traumatic condition, nor does she seek to maintain it ad infinitum; unlike in *La Femme sans sépulture*, these scenes of loss do not appear as isolated fragments within a larger narrative. Thus while Djebar eschews the strictly linear model of autobiography, her text nonetheless follows a certain chronology from infancy through adolescence. Images (re)appear to haunt *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, but

²⁸ Djebar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 267.

²⁹ Donadey, 'L'expression littéraire', p. 77.

³⁰ Djebar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 24.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 211.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

they do not disrupt its forward-moving impetus; ultimately they become framed within the autofictional narrative.

Moreover, melancholia and haunting, which were initially entertained as ethical models of remembrance, are now regarded as self-destructive modes of non-being. Most notably, Djébar is critical of the silence surrounding her own traumatic experiences, a critique which is highlighted by the second scene of loss, that of the death of her baby brother. Recounting, for the first time in her oeuvre, the death of her sibling, Djébar recalls how her father had implored her never to vocalize the loss again, for fear of prolonging her mother's grief: 'On le taira donc. On l'enterra à nous trois, très vite, les années suivantes'.³⁴ Yet this melancholic incorporation of the lost brother, whose ghostly memory becomes buried in a psychic crypt within the family, only causes more suffering than if the grief had been addressed directly. Referred to merely as the 'petit frère' or the 'premier fils',³⁵ he cannot be named and mourned, that is, his loss cannot be rendered linguistically. It is Djébar's younger sister who points to the transgenerational effects of this melancholic response to loss when she finally speaks out against 'les secrets de famille'³⁶ and their concomitant 'mutisme':³⁷

Voici la scène que j'ai vécue enfant et qui a laissé en moi des traces. J'ai dû la refouler pendant des décennies. Sauf qu'il y a quelques années elle a réapparu au milieu d'une séance d'analyse... Souviens-toi, j'avais choisi presque de concert avec toi ce psychanalyste parlant aussi arabe, puisque d'origine égyptienne.³⁸

As in *Le Village de l'Allemand* and *La Femme sans sépulture*, the internalization of loss leads inevitably to the return of the repressed or the transgenerational return of the phantom. Not only did her sister experience the loss as an unconscious absence that she was compelled to come to terms with, unexpectedly, in adulthood, but she also suffered from the somatic

³⁴ Ibid., p. 86.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 85.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 90.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 90.

symptoms of trauma as a child: upon reflection, Djébar concedes that shortly after her brother's death her sister began to suffer from asthma. If this scene attests to the inevitability of trauma's latent effects, then, it also suggests that silence itself can be traumatic. Indeed, it is the family's 'silences concertés', perhaps more so than the loss of the baby brother, that prolongs suffering.³⁹ The text's epilogue, entitled 'Le Silence ou les années-tombeaux', points to the notion that it is melancholia and its multiple layers of silence—what Cathy Caruth might term the 'unspeakability' of trauma—that wreaks havoc on its victims. Yet silence in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* is not presented as an inevitable effect of trauma, but rather as an autonomous choice; the corollary is that silence itself can be at the origins of trauma.

If in *La Femme sans sépulture* Djébar is anxious not to construct a linguistic tomb, in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* silence is equated with a temporal crypt that mummifies its victims. The fear of erasure through introjection is thus superseded by the fear of silence, which is associated with melancholia and haunting. Throughout the narrative Djébar repeatedly laments her own silence vis-à-vis her suicide attempt:

Ce qui, aujourd'hui, m'étonne et m'attriste, et me trouble, c'est qu'après ce matin d'octobre [...] je me suis définitivement tue sur ce délire qui m'avait saisie, emportée, et qui aurait pu m'être fatal; je le constate à présent puisque j'y reviens de front, et non pas allusivement par le biais de quelque personnage. Je n'ai jamais posé, par la suite, sur cet acte fou le moindre mot.⁴⁰

The past participle *tue* (past participle of *se taire*) resonates with its homonym *tue* (first- and third-person singular of *tuer*), evincing the relationship between silence and death, and calling to mind the 'refrain tragique: "Si mon père le sait, je me tue"',⁴¹ which eventually transmutes

³⁹ Ibid., p. 90.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 400.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 390.

into ‘Mon père... me tue!’.⁴² More than her interminable silence before her father or her fiancé, however, Djébar is critical of her silence towards herself: ‘Se taire devant soi-même: ce fut le plus grave’.⁴³ Yet if, for Djébar, ‘Ce sont ces décennies immobiles qui soudain me paraissent des tombeaux’,⁴⁴ and if ‘à jamais, ce jour semble suspendu pour moi’,⁴⁵ now is the time to engage with ‘la scène immobile’.⁴⁶ *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* thus figures Djébar’s attempt to come face to face with the very traumas that she has repressed—both consciously and unconsciously—her entire adult life:⁴⁷ ‘C’est décidé, je choisis de raconter cette transition’.⁴⁸

Early in the narrative Djébar thus returns to a pivotal scene from her childhood when, assisted by a local boy named Maurice, she learns how to ride a bicycle for the first time. If this milestone in her life is initially a source of joy, it soon becomes tainted by her father, whose critical response bewilders the young Djébar. Writing decades later, the event remains a wound that has yet to heal: ‘de ce passé quelque chose vrille dans ma mémoire, devient blessure, griffure’.⁴⁹ Several pages later, Djébar announces, ‘Je me rappelle cette blessure qu’il m’infligea comme s’il m’en avait tatouée, encore à cette heure où j’écris, plus d’un demi-siècle plus tard!’.⁵⁰ In this section of her *auto-analyse* Djébar very deliberately recounts how her father forbade her from cycling because it meant exposing her legs. Too young to

⁴² Ibid., p. 391.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 426.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 435.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 379.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 441.

⁴⁷ As Mireille Calle-Gruber points out, Djébar’s claim that she has never written one word about her attempted suicide is untrue, since she briefly tackles the subject in *L’Amour, la fantasia*. This untruth points to Djébar’s double forgetting of trauma and, indeed, to the autofictional element of *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*. See Mireille Calle-Gruber, ‘La Servante du texte’, in *Assia Djébar: littérature et transmission*, ed. by Wolfgang Asholt, Mireille Calle-Gruber and Dominique Combe (Paris: Presses Sorbonne nouvelle, 2012), pp. 197-210 (pp. 204-05).

⁴⁸ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 275.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

frame this prohibition in terms of Islamic codes of conduct—namely, the gendered place of women in society, her father’s concerns vis-à-vis the male gaze, and his ostensible fear that his daughter might undermine his social standing—Djebar experiences this interdiction as an injury that she cannot comprehend. Her father’s deployment of the Arabic term for legs, translated within the narrative as the French *jambes*, is littered across several pages. Appearing as a fragment throughout the text, the repetition of ‘jambes’ gives expression to the manner in which the father’s objectification of Djebar’s legs incites a sense of dismemberment.⁵¹ The putative unity between body and mind hitherto experienced by the young girl is destroyed instantaneously; the term *jambes* appears as a floating signifier devoid of any referent, just as Djebar begins to see her own legs as separate and other to herself: ‘Je n’ai retenu de sa phrase, comme une flèche d’acier qui résonne entre nous, que ses deux mots en arabe: “ses jambes”’.⁵² The term takes on a meaning all of its own, figuring as a weapon that threatens the father-daughter relationship. Indeed, the ‘interdiction patriarcale’⁵³ is so unexpected and so alien that Djebar imagines her father has been replaced by another man: ‘le père s’était soudain changé en un autre!’.⁵⁴

As Djebar begins to remember the scene, she does not simply give an account of the event and proceed to examine the next stage in her life. Rather, she repeatedly returns to the event, reworking it and retranslating it, so that the very act of writing becomes a tool for working upon the past. Thus if, at first, Djebar’s recollection of the scene appears to conform to a linear, autobiographical approach, it soon becomes clear that she seeks to revise the event in order to situate it within a larger framework. Certain images, phrases, and sentences

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 55, 57, 58, 60, 62.

⁵² Ibid., p. 55.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 59.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 56.

reappear throughout the twelve pages devoted to the scene but, importantly, in each case they are slightly modified. Language becomes a means of (re)constructing a form of memory that resists static textualization or monumentalization, enabling the past to be (re)viewed through the lens of the present. In particular Djebbar returns to the violent reaction of her father as he notices her on the bicycle:

Je ne veux pas, non, je ne veux pas—répète-il très haut à ma mère, accourcie et silencieuse—, je ne veux pas que ma fille montre ses jambes en montant à bicyclette! Puis, sans attendre, il rejoint leur chambre.⁵⁵

This is then followed, some seven pages later, by this slightly altered version of events as Djebbar reworks the scene again:

Je ne veux pas (il crie)! Je ne veux pas que ma fille montre ses jambes devant les autres au village! Puis il va s'enfermer dans leur chambre.⁵⁶

What occurs, then, is a subtle shift in both the language and signification of the scene. If, at the time, Djebbar could not understand why her 'naked' legs had to be concealed, in hindsight she is able to reframe the prohibition within the socio-religious context of pre-independence Algeria: in the eyes of her father—and by extension other villagers—such an act might have appeared impudent. This is not to say that Djebbar condones her father's actions, but that working upon the past enables her to situate the event within a wider historical framework.

Djebbar teases out new mnemonic elements each time she returns to the scene, doing so deliberately in order to explore, question, and reframe her past. *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* cannot, therefore, be reduced to a mere chronology of events that are fixed in time, nor can it be read as a nostalgic return to the lost origins of childhood. Rather, Djebbar very consciously seeks to revise, adapt, and understand her past in light of her present self. For

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 55.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

Peter Brooks, narrative return is always fraught with ambivalence, oscillating between repetition and change:

the concept of repetition hovers ambiguously between the idea of reproduction and that of change, forward and backward movement [...]. Repetition creates a *return* in the text, a doubling back. We cannot say whether this return is a return *to* or a return *of*, for instance, a return to origins or a return of the repressed.⁵⁷

If certain events do return as the repressed, this is nevertheless not the predominant mode of return enacted in the narrative. If the text suggests that trauma can never be fully surmounted, Djébar nonetheless endeavours to limit its haunting power, seeking instead to relocate each memory within a larger narrative. The scenes become images that she retraces so that each new version is both a derivative of, and a transformative reworking of, the past. With each repetition comes adjustment and mutation, indicating that, in the words of Brooks, Djébar's narrative seeks change rather than sterile reproduction.

Revised versions of events are not necessarily more authentic or complete. Djébar does not claim to give a wholly accurate, word for word rendition of her life, nor is that her aim. Rather than seek a finalized, complete version of the past that can be monumentalized and forgotten, the text seeks instead to problematize events and the manner in which they are remembered. *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* is thus replete with references to Djébar's 'misremembering'. As she returns to the bicycle scene—itsself symbolic of the process of working upon enacted within the text at large—Djébar expresses doubts over the authenticity of some of the details: 'Je crois';⁵⁸ 'J'ai dû';⁵⁹ 'Je ne crois pas qu'il vint nous rejoindre pour dîner'.⁶⁰ Later in the narrative as she works upon the memory of her suicide attempt, Djébar poses many questions that remain unanswered: 'Je ne trouve pas de

⁵⁷ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 100.

⁵⁸ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 56.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

réponse'.⁶¹ Each memorial version of a memory problematizes another, revealing that there is no single, inherent 'truth' to be sought or recovered. Her inability to fully account for her experiences is testament to the difficulties of mnemonic or historical reconstruction. Djébar actively refutes any easy palliative and, like Inspector Llob and Detective Larbi in Khadra and Sansal's novels, her model of working upon the past is fundamentally self-questioning and critical, tracing the intersections between memorial threads rather than proposing a dominant version. Devoid of mastery, Djébar's narrative ultimately remains open to doubt and, significantly, to the vulnerability of the self.

Auto-analysis and the Other

Within *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* Djébar inaugurates an ethical mode of relating to the lost other that begins, paradoxically, with a return to the self. Such a self-referential engagement with loss is particularly challenging in a post-Holocaust, postcolonial era in which the ethical protection of the other is viewed as paramount. Yet even if our responsibility for the alterity of the 'tout autre'⁶² is the *sina qua non* of much twentieth-century philosophy and theory, Geoffrey Bennington reminds us that the ethical gesture towards the other often belies a more self-oriented philosophy.⁶³ In *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* we have seen how Djébar also indicates that her melancholic resurrection of her friends' ghosts might be interpreted as a narcissistic gesture that seeks to preserve the self and to maintain the status quo. With this in mind, her turn to autofiction might appear to undermine endeavours to attend to the singularity of the other, particularly since autofiction is regarded as a self-indulgent form of

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 378.

⁶² Jacques Derrida, 'Roland Barthes', in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, ed. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Paris: Galilée, 2003), pp. 57-97 (p. 67).

⁶³ Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 39.

discourse. Yet, as Vilain argues, ‘Il serait naïf de croire qu’il suffit de ne pas écrire d’autofiction pour échapper au soupçon de narcissisme. Le narcissisme se joue ailleurs, dans des régions périphériques à l’écriture elle-même’.⁶⁴ Perhaps, then, in utilizing a model that practitioners or critics openly associate with narcissism, Djébar is more open to—and therefore more able to consciously circumvent—the tendency to gravitate towards it. What is more, the importance of the ‘retour sur soi’ in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, described as exhibiting ‘une radicalité jusqu’alors inconnue chez Assia Djébar’, suggests equally that the veneration of the other has been at the psychological expense of the self.⁶⁵ In her latest literary venture Djébar thus deploys the autofictional mode to suggest that an ethics of loss must first engage the self if it is to avoid the subliminal and circuitous appropriation of the other that, according to Bennington, permeates so-called ethical discourse.

In postulating a return to the self, Djébar’s latest project resonates with the recent work of Judith Butler in *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005). In these texts, Butler seeks to theorize a model of grief that would circumvent the narcissism inherent to melancholia. Returning to Freud’s idea that the melancholic subject may know who it is, but not what it is about a person that is lost, Butler argues that it is this very ‘unknowingness’ that can stimulate a transformative mode of grief.⁶⁶ This unknowingness renders the subject fundamentally vulnerable, suggests Butler, which in turn can engender an ethics of loss. If the grieving subject accedes to loss and its unpredictable, transformative potentials, this can open the self up to the radical precariousness of life and hence to the vulnerability of the other. Rather than theorize a model of grief in which the (putative) binary between self and other signals a code of ethics, then, Butler argues that an acknowledgement

⁶⁴ Vilain, p. 110.

⁶⁵ Ruhe, ‘Enjambements et envols’, p. 38.

⁶⁶ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 30.

of the self's imbrication in the other is at the heart of an ethics of loss. In terms of narratology, this intractable bond between self and other is expressed via the subject's failure to narrate the self:

the very "I" is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing. [...]. My narrative falters, as it must.⁶⁷

If language ostensibly fails to provide a fully comprehensible account of the self, suggests Butler, this is because the subject is constituted by the other in ways that remain unknown and unforeseeable.

This inability to give a totalizing account of oneself overshadows *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* as Djébar's self-entitled 'confession' fails to engender self-sufficiency or transparency.⁶⁸ Her narrative is replete with terms that point to the opacity of the self, even as she attempts to '[s]'expliquer à [s]oi-même' and to comprehend the motives behind her silence.⁶⁹ When she endeavours to understand why she has finally decided to recount her attempted suicide—'(Seulement parce que le père est mort?)'—she cannot reach a satisfying conclusion:⁷⁰ 'La confusion demeure: je croyais l'éclaircir et je découvre pis dans cette écriture au présent'.⁷¹ Instead, she finds herself faced with a lacuna that she cannot fill with words alone:

Moi qui écris aujourd'hui, qui viens de reprendre dans le détail, au plus près, les secondes, les minutes de celle qui, ce matin-là [...] s'est jetée, puis s'est couchée sur les rails devant le tramway venant en trombe, oui, moi, aujourd'hui qui reconstitue par les mots de la langue française ces secondes et ces minutes d'un trou béant [...] moi, aujourd'hui, face à cette béance...⁷²

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

⁶⁸ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 445.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 419.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 425.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 425.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 413-14.

Despite the meticulous care with which she embarks upon this ‘écrit[ure] sur soi’,⁷³ Djébar is unable to reconstitute the self or the past in a manner that would bring about salvation or catharsis. She remains ‘Obscure donc à moi-même, durant cette ultime étape, même si je m’étais dressée, “nue”, dévoilée face aux miroirs du monde’,⁷⁴ describing herself as ‘aveugle à moi-même, malgré un regard tourné en dedans’.⁷⁵ She is instead left to wonder: ‘comment rendre cette auto-analyse rétrospective “soyeuse”, et donc rassurante, puisque source de lucidité, voire de sérénité?’⁷⁶ This question is largely rhetorical, however, since Djébar is acutely aware that her ‘autodévoilement’ will never achieve the level of coherence or restoration that she seemingly desires.⁷⁷

Yet this failure to illuminate or indeed to know the self via confessional discourse, a mode of address described by Djébar as ‘un itinéraire sprituel ou intellectuel’, is the first step in an ethical journey towards the other for, as Butler reminds us:⁷⁸

when I near the prospect of intellectual self-sufficiency in the presence of the other, nearly excluding him or her from my horizon, the thread of my story unravels. If I achieve that self-sufficiency, my relation to the other is lost.⁷⁹

If the subject begins to imagine herself as an autonomous being, or to gesture towards ostensible mastery, there can be no possibility of an ethical engagement with the other. The putative failure of auto-analysis is thus a necessary component in the inauguration of a new ethics of loss, calling to mind Derrida’s statement regarding the ‘failure’ of introjection.⁸⁰ It is precisely this sense of failure that signals the difference between Djébar’s attempt to write the self and that of Berkane in *La Disparition de la langue française*: if, in the words of Stephan

⁷³ Ibid., p. 445.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 268.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 268.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 445.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 446.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 446.

⁷⁹ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 68.

⁸⁰ See Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), p. 54.

Leopold, 'Berkane se représente à soi-même', Djébar's self-portraiture elides her and language becomes slippery and incapable of elucidating her inner self.⁸¹ It is not that Berkane succeeds where Djébar fails, but rather that, unlike Berkane, Djébar is conscious that her 'impatience d'autoconnaissance' will never be fully realized.⁸²

This opacity of the self, in which the subject becomes other to itself, emerges throughout *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* as Djébar's narrative self slips between subjecthood (*je*) and objectification (*elle*). While Donadey regards this oscillation as an indication that Djébar has come too close to the memory of the trauma she is reviving,⁸³ I would venture instead that it marks Djébar's ethical exploration of the self as other. A particular case in point is when she oscillates between the first- and third-person during four stand-alone, textual fragments that recount her attempted suicide.⁸⁴ The four passages are situated in amongst other, more protracted segments concerning Djébar's failed suicide, which revise and rework the event in a manner akin to the process of working upon initiated early on in the narrative. By employing the third-person narrative voice, Djébar gains a degree of distance from the event, enabling her to analyse it from a different perspective; she is not simply reliving the event, but consciously re-inscribing it. And while the use of the third-person actively creates distance, it also gives expression to the author's innate sense of otherness, which emerges more clearly as the narrative progresses.

Butler theorizes this ethical destabilization of the self as a form of dispossession, arguing that unknowingness leads to a critical consideration of 'how we are not only

⁸¹ Stephan Leopold, 'Figures d'un impossible retour: L'inaccessible chez Assia Djébar', in *Assia Djébar: littérature et transmission*, ed. by Wolfgang Asholt, Mireille Calle-Gruber and Dominique Combe (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010), pp. 141-56 (p. 154).

⁸² Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 46.

⁸³ Donadey, 'L'expression littéraire', p. 79.

⁸⁴ In the first scene Djébar utilizes the third-person and in the second scene she employs the first person; she then repeats this sequence for the third and fourth scenes. See pp. 395-98.

constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well'.⁸⁵ In stark contrast to the manner in which melancholia instantiates 'a form of possession more intimate than any material relationship could produce', then, Butler's theorization of grief emphasizes the disruptive effects of loss.⁸⁶ The radical alterity of the other lies beyond the bounds of incorporation and, suggests Butler, 'the primary others who are past for me [...] haunt the way I am, as it were, periodically undone and open to becoming unbounded'.⁸⁷ Even a brief consideration of the title of Djébar's narrative, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, indicates that the text is one of disinheritance and dispossession. Permutations of this phrase emerge throughout the narrative and Djébar describes herself as 'sans lieu',⁸⁸ wondering: "'Nulle part dans la maison de mon père?' Déposée?".⁸⁹ Jane Hiddleston has also underscored the text's 'repeated references to rootlessness', revealing how Djébar finds herself increasingly disinherited from her Algerian homeland.⁹⁰

In particular Djébar reveals herself to be culturally dispossessed by her father, beginning with his anger as she 'transgresses' socio-cultural and religious norms by exposing her bare legs on a bicycle as a child, and leading to the scene of her attempted suicide, in which she fears she has transgressed the father's law through her relationship with Tarik. Djébar's physical exile from her native land is echoed by her sense of cultural and familial dispossession as she is disinherited from the very paternal lineage that, owing to her connection with her *Mamma*, was so important to her. The double loss of the father figure—

⁸⁵ Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 24.

⁸⁶ Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 9.

⁸⁷ Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 28.

⁸⁸ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 427. See also Hiddleston, 'The Mother as Other', p. 24.

⁸⁹ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, pp. 404-5

⁹⁰ Hiddleston, 'The Mother as Other', p. 25. See also Jane Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar: Out of Algeria* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006). Hiddleston figures Djébar's oeuvre as a gradual process of expropriation and disinheritance.

both on the fateful day of her suicide attempt and through his death—has a profound effect on Djébar, informing her vexed and ambivalent relationship with loss. As in *Le Village de l'Allemand*, the father figure, elicited at first via ‘l’image idéale du père’,⁹¹ operates as an ego-ideal: ‘la relation avec le père était une relation d’identification (il est qualifié d’“alter ego”)’.⁹² Indeed, as Ana De Medeiros argues, until *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* Djébar’s father was depicted in a largely positive manner.⁹³ It is notable, however, that in this, her latest narrative, she attempts to circumvent the melancholic silence that has informed her grief, acceding instead to the irrevocable sense of dispossession wrought by her separation from her father. Indeed, Djébar embraces this rupture, exploring the effects of loss upon the self, even as she struggles to make sense of or articulate the transformation she has undergone (and continues to experience). Rather than preserve the idealized image of the other, then, Djébar begins by tracing the way in which she is simultaneously, to paraphrase Butler, constituted by and dispossessed by her ties to her father.

Djébar’s analysis of her ambivalent relationship with her father begins with a return to the scene entitled ‘La Bicyclette’, a return, that is, to the incident that first tarnished their relationship. Then, as Djébar begins to work upon her failed suicide, she also starts to probe in greater depth its connection to her father. Acknowledging the ambivalence she harbours towards him, Djébar wonders: ‘Le père aimé et sublime? Le père juge, quoi que libérateur et juge forcément étroit?’⁹⁴ In (re)analysing the manner in which Tarik’s ‘infidelity’ led to her suicide attempt—figured as a form of escapism from a rigid, patriarchal social order—Djébar comes to realize to what extent her father is entangled within this trauma. As she works upon

⁹¹ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 53.

⁹² Donadey, ‘L’expression littéraire’, p. 77.

⁹³ De Medeiros, ‘Writing as Wounding and Healing’, p. 279.

⁹⁴ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 425.

the moment when she and Tarik quarrelled over his demand—in short, that she summon, and apologize to, the very ‘friend’ who had tried to come between them—Djebar contends, ‘Dès la première minute de face à face, je sais, je sens, en effet que je n’ai plus de lieu! Je n’aurai même plus la maison de mon père!’.⁹⁵ As she returns to their argument and endeavours to resituate it within a larger framework, Djebar comes to note the manner in which Tarik’s betrayal is linked to her father’s prohibition(s):

Cette même personne, écrivant la relation plus de cinquante ans après, vient à peine de comprendre que s’est joué là [...] un mini-drame à double sens: en ces minutes, derrière le jeune homme [...] c’est l’ombre soudain géante du père qui a encombré la baie d’Alger.⁹⁶

It is via the process of working upon the past, in this case in the form of a written mode of *auto-analyse*, that Djebar realizes the extent to which the father figure has been melancholically conflated with Tarik, whom she would later marry. The father’s original command and prohibition is tied in with Tarik’s order—‘Le “non”, le mot unique’—and the two figures are indelibly linked via their patriarchal conservatism.⁹⁷ If, following the bicycle scene, the father becomes a stranger to Djebar, Tarik’s outburst also renders him other: ‘je me trouve devant un étranger’.⁹⁸ Djebar describes him as an ‘inconnu,’⁹⁹ later contending, ‘L’autre, en face, l’inconnu ou le trop connu’.¹⁰⁰ Tarik becomes a stranger, but he is also ‘trop connu’ because he mirrors the father.¹⁰¹

Djebar’s failed suicide is haunted by her father’s figurative dismemberment of her body: ‘À l’ultime seconde, j’ai imaginé mon corps de jeune fille coupé... en trois!’.¹⁰²

Positioned on the tracks as she awaits the fatal arrival of the tram, Djebar imagines herself cut

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 380.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 423.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 380.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 380.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 381.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 386.

¹⁰¹ See De Medeiros, ‘Writing as Wounding and Healing’, p. 289.

¹⁰² Djebar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 396.

into three pieces, an image that symbolically recalls her father's dislocation of her body as a young child.¹⁰³ The paternal figure, as an ambiguous guardian of Arabo-Berber culture, is symbolized as her judge, and transmutes into the ghostly 'conducteur du char de la mort'.¹⁰⁴ If, at first, then, it might appear that Djébar's suicide is the result of her troubled romance, she later contends: 'L'auteure interpellée tenterait de se défendre, plutôt mal: "Je me suis projetée à dix-sept ans dans l'ampleur de la baie d'Alger, en cette aube d'automne, c'est le père que je fuyais"'.¹⁰⁵ The belated process of working upon the past thus opens up different perspectives on the event, effectively transforming it according to new, at times painful, insights. In working upon her failed suicide, Djébar invokes variations of the following phrase, 'Si mon père le sait, je me tue', no fewer than eleven times.¹⁰⁶ This 'phrase tragique' appears as a pulsating tempo, revealing the intense torment that propelled the seventeen-year-old Djébar to attempt suicide.¹⁰⁷ Notably, however, there is repetition with a difference as the structure and language of the refrain is modified with each invocation. As with the bicycle scene, then, each textual revision gives expression to a larger process of transformation that is key to new modes of memorialization.

Acknowledging the anguish that consciously working upon the past can engender, Djébar wonders whether, 'au dernier stade de ta vie', it might be preferable to seek 'un semblant de sérénité' or 'une douce ou indifférente acceptation'.¹⁰⁸ Yet this is but a futile desire for, even as Djébar remembers the maternal figure, the process of working upon loss eschews palliatives. If, for Mildred Mortimer, 'Autobiography becomes Djébar's way back to

¹⁰³ De Medeiros, 'Writing as Wounding and Healing', p. 278.

¹⁰⁴ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 423.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 385, 390, 391, 392, 394, 409, 410, 413, 419, 420, 422.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

the cherished maternal world of her past, where she seeks healing and reconciliation',¹⁰⁹ the autofictional return to the mother in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* does not operate as a restorative journey back to the symbolic motherland.¹¹⁰ In contrast to Berkane in *La Disparition de la langue française*, if Djébar returns to her parents, suggests Hiddleston, 'this will not be in the hope of restoring a lost heritage'.¹¹¹ In her article, Hiddleston outlines the way in which Djébar's depiction of her 'mother as other' moves beyond the typical Oedipal paradigm, consciously rejecting narcissistic modes of identification in favour of a model based on touch.¹¹² Building on Jean-Luc Nancy's theorization of a community based on touch in *Corpus* and *La Communauté désœuvrée*, Hiddleston contends that, 'Touch both inaugurates and interrupts contact, it takes place on the surface, at the limit of the body and prevents fusion or incorporation'.¹¹³ What is more, 'Touch [...] is an ethical form of communality, since it relies not on mutual identification or forced sameness, but on ruptured, respectful proximity'.¹¹⁴ Following her misgivings vis-à-vis the incorporation and literary appropriation of the lost object in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* and *La Femme sans sépulture*, Djébar consciously constructs an ethereal, almost distant, image of her mother, who remains beyond her grasp. The mother remains 'an enigmatic, intractable figure', reflecting something of Butler's view that an ethical relationality to the lost other must be attuned to what is unknowable and beyond reach.¹¹⁵ Indeed, there is the overarching sense that while Djébar may indeed know who it is she has lost, she does not know what it is about her mother that she has lost. Her recourse to the language of touch thus enables her to tentatively sketch an image of the

¹⁰⁹ Mildred Mortimer, 'Assia Djébar's "Algerian Quartet": a Study in Fragmented Autobiography', *Research in African Literatures*, 28.2 (1997), 102-17 (p. 103).

¹¹⁰ Hiddleston, 'The Mother as Other', p. 25.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

mother that resists containment and signals the unknowingness at the heart of their relationship.

For Butler, too, touch becomes a point of departure for an ethical relationship with the other. Yet rather than emphasize the sense of ‘ethical detachment’ that Nancy’s conceptualization of touch facilitates,¹¹⁶ Butler points to its inherent dangers. Reflecting upon how ‘Violence is surely a touch of the worst order’,¹¹⁷ she figures its potential to descend into brutality or abuse as a marker of our vulnerability to the touch of others: ‘The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well’.¹¹⁸ It is precisely the subject’s awareness of his or her vulnerability, suggests Butler, that opens us up to the fragility of the other. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than after the death of a loved one, when grief and psychological rupture places the subject in the position of victim. Rather than wallow in the pathos of victimhood, however, a recognition of the vulnerability of the self can engender a partial understanding of the vulnerability of the other who is, after all, irrevocably tied to the self:

The disorientation of grief—“Who have I become?” or, indeed, “What is left of me?” “What is it in the Other that I have lost?”—posits the “I” in the mode of unknowingness. But this can be a point of departure for a new understanding if the narcissistic preoccupation of melancholia can be moved into a consideration of the vulnerability of others. Then we might critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others.¹¹⁹

Rather than melancholically preserving the other, Butler encourages an ethical mode of grief that opens us up to the precariousness of life. If the ‘I’ can so readily be undone and dispossessed by loss, then so can the other. Importantly for the theorization of new modes of

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

¹¹⁷ Butler, *Precairous Life*, p. 28.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

working upon, Butler's conceptualization of grief is as relevant for the living as it is for the dead. Indeed, the current preoccupation with the past and its lost others, while welcome, is sometimes at risk of obscuring the present and those 'ungrievable' lives that will never be mourned because they do not register as lives.¹²⁰ In *La Disparition de la langue française*, Djébar similarly indicates that a myopic return to the past can operate at the expense of those individuals who will, inevitably, become the lost others of tomorrow. Rather than advocate, as does R. Clifton Spargo, for melancholia as an ethical response to loss because it enacts the belated safeguarding of the other, Butler highlights the need for an ethics of loss that begins with the vulnerability of the other when s/he is alive.¹²¹

If, for Djébar, this model of ethics arrives, perhaps, too late, she nonetheless engages with the possibility of a relationality based on the precariousness of life. In particular, in recounting her suicide attempt in Algiers, Djébar highlights her vulnerability both on that day and during the years of silence that followed. The prospective 'touch' of the tram—'Coucher mon corps en travers des rails: la mort viendra plus sûrement, la machine est lancée'—leaves no doubt as to the vulnerability of the author.¹²² Djébar's repeated references to herself as a 'corps,' moreover, accentuate her fragility and the real harm that the tram could have caused to her body.¹²³

If suicide is typically conceived as an act through which the subject succeeds in treating himself as an object, or else as an attempt to kill the simultaneously loved and hated lost object that the subject has, via a process of melancholic identification, become, then

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

¹²¹ R. Clifton Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 13.

¹²² Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 410.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 396-97.

Djebar's attempted suicide can be read as an effort to annihilate the father and the fiancé.¹²⁴

Returning to the scene, however, Djebar invokes herself not simply as *un corps* or an object, but as a face, suggesting a return to her self:

Désormais, si longtemps après, sur ce silence, je me force à réfléchir: combler, habiter ce blanc comme si une exigence me contraignait à scruter un visage muet – mon visage. La voici donc enfin, cette figure sans regard ni parole, figée par une interrogation pareille à celle qui effleurerait un nouveau-né, ou un enfant durci, sans soupirs ni larmes.¹²⁵

Djebar deliberately 'forces' herself to work upon the striking image of her own face, which is figured as a speechless and 'gazeless' figure. The muteness of the visage underscores Djebar's continued silence after the event as well as her own intractability, but it also captures the sheer fragility of Djebar at the moment she attempted suicide. The description of herself as a 'nouveau-né' emphasises this vulnerability: though a baby cannot speak in conventional, linguistic terms, its fragility nonetheless incites the other both to protect and to respond to it.¹²⁶

Notably, however, the process of working upon the past does not end with Djebar's recognition of the fragility of the self. Instead, her own sense of vulnerability immediately opens her up to the precariousness of the tram driver who saved her life:

la voix du conducteur de tramway—dont je n'ai jamais vu le visage—m'est restée si présente, des décennies plus tard [?]. Cette voix d'inconnu, encore frémissante, pas vraiment effrayée, plutôt... tournoyante.¹²⁷

Djebar is called out of her self-referentiality—indicated by the phrase 'se lamenter sur soi'—by the voice of an other.¹²⁸ Her recognition of her own vulnerability thus brings forth her

¹²⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *On the History of the Psycho-analytic Movement: Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 243-58 (p. 252). See also Julia Kristeva, *Soleil noir: dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 20.

¹²⁵ Djebar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 401.

¹²⁶ In *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* Djebar also describes her fragile, elderly mother as 'devenue presque bébé' in the wake of her father's death (p. 106).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

attentiveness to the vulnerability of the tram driver, foreclosing a descent into narcissistic reflection. If the voice of the unknown *pied noir* remains ‘inconnu’ then so does his memory, which cannot be neatly assigned to the past. Djebbar invokes his voice in parentheses, suggesting that it cannot be assimilated within the narrative but instead challenges the author to attend to its radical difference: ‘(La voix crie, son écho se prolonge jusqu’à s’incruster en moi)’.¹²⁹ Djebbar returns to the driver several times throughout the narrative, focusing in particular on his vulnerability: ‘si longtemps après, je sais que je le reconnaîtrai, cet homme, je le reconnaîtrai à sa voix quasi désespérée’.¹³⁰ She later contends, ‘c’est désormais la voix du conducteur—voix pleine d’alarme alors que la vigueur de sa main sûre t’aura sauvé la vie—, oui, c’est cette voix d’inconnu qui te revient’.¹³¹ Djebbar revisits the scene of her suicide from the perspective of the other, acknowledging the fear and anxiety the driver must have experienced as he came face to face with a troubled young girl on the tracks. In many ways, he operates as the archetypal other: though he cannot be known or assimilated within the narrative, both he and Djebbar remain inexorably interconnected because of the vulnerability they experienced that day. As Butler puts it, ‘I am not fully known to myself, because part of what I am is the enigmatic traces of others. In this sense, I cannot know myself perfectly or know my “difference” from others in an irreducible way’.¹³² As both Djebbar and Butler suggest, an ethics of grief begins with the realization that the self and the other are imbricated in life as in death and that, consequently, the bonds that define us are inherently vulnerable and unstable. Loss threatens these ties, leading to transformative processes that alter the subject in necessarily unpredictable ways.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 401.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 398.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 437.

¹³² Butler, *Prekarious Life*, p. 48.

In *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* Djébar thus imagines a new ethics of loss that begins with a return to the self. It is a return that must necessarily fail, however, if an ethics of relationality is to be inaugurated. Djébar's failure to know the self, and her vulnerability in the wake of the loss of the other, engenders an appreciation of the other, in life as in death, as a fragile, intractable, singular, individual. Moreover, in moving from a melancholic model based on possession to one founded on dispossession, Djébar seeks to move beyond a kind of grief that seeks to immobilize or preserve the past and, hence, the self. Instead, like Butler, Djébar points to the need to accept loss and to submit to its transformative processes, however painful or difficult they might be. Indeed, she does not proffer a palliative or a utopian model, nor can her model be read as complete. She describes her own 'auto-analyse' as a 'geste auto-meutrier', reflecting both the difficulties of giving an account of oneself in the wake of loss as well as the notion that change can only be realized if we accept that preserving the status quo is not a viable ethical option.¹³³ Thus in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* Djébar learns to 'Se dire à soi-même adieu',¹³⁴ reflecting the manner in which Derrida's *adieu* to his friends in *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* is both a mode of address and a way of saying goodbye.¹³⁵ Indeed, by liberating herself in this manner, Djébar is free to continue the transformative process she has begun: 'Et tu te purifies par des mots de poussière et de braises. Tatoutée, tu marches sans savoir où, l'horizon droit devant. C'est cela, jusqu'à l'horizon!'.¹³⁶ Djébar is purified and renewed by her confessional discourse, but she nonetheless remains marked, a sign that she cannot, indeed will not, seek to erase the past: it is precisely her loss that informs her sense of being. Importantly, too, her narrative is future-

¹³³ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 435.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

¹³⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, ed. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Paris: Galilée, 2003)

¹³⁶ Djébar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 441.

oriented, moving towards an unknowable horizon and pointing to the notion that grief is an on-going process.

As *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* seeks to move beyond the binary of mourning and melancholia, it gives expression to recent theorizations of ‘working through’ by Dominick LaCapra and Mireille Rosello, whose criticism of the all-or-nothing logic of memorialization is also shared by Butler who, in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, contends that:

learning to construct a narrative is a crucial practice, especially when discontinuous bits of experience remain dissociated from one another by virtue of traumatic conditions. And I do not mean to undervalue the importance of narrative work in the reconstruction of a life that otherwise suffers from fragmentation and discontinuity. Conditions of hyper-mastery, however, are no more salutary than conditions of radical fragmentation.¹³⁷

Importantly, just as *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* is informed by dispossession rather than mastery, it also refuses to fetishize the traumatic condition, suggesting that narratives that seek to move forward do not necessarily lead to the unethical rejection of the past. In this way, Djebbar’s thinking meets with that of Irene Visser, who, in a recent discussion of trauma theory and the postcolonial novel, suggests the need for ‘narratives that are forward looking, striving for subversion of the traumatic experience rather than its containment in melancholia’.¹³⁸ It is an endeavour, suggests Djebbar, that has only just begun.

¹³⁷ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, p. 52.

¹³⁸ Irene Visser, ‘Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 47.3 (2011), 270-82 (p. 279).

CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to problematize the central tenets of the recent and widespread interdisciplinary rehabilitation of melancholia. Depathologized by theorists in disciplines such as postcolonial studies, queer theory, and philosophy, this ‘millennial melancholia’ arose in conjunction with the widespread memory boom of the twentieth century and its attendant anxiety over the politics of representation. If, in the wake of momentous historical events such as the Holocaust and decolonization, mourning has been viewed with an ever-increasing scepticism verging on hostility, melancholia has been proffered by some theorists as the mnemonic model par excellence of the new millennium. Valued for its rebuttal of closure, melancholia is seen to succeed precisely where mourning fails. In particular, proponents highlight melancholia’s continued preservation of the lost object, celebrating it as an ethical sign of dissension on the part of the grieving ego. In fields that deal with the remembrance of marginalized, disenfranchised or erased groups and individuals, this steadfast attachment to the object is of particular import. The value attributed to the melancholic’s refusal to ‘move on’ has its roots in the development of trauma theory, which oftentimes valorizes—fetishizes even—the traumatic condition because it disavows the amnesia typically associated with mourning and finitude. Tropes of *hantologie* and spectrality are also prevalent in contemporary theory and the figure of the ghost, regarded as an ethical marker, is in many ways the most recognizable symbol of the haunting, and haunted, lost object.

Melancholia has, at times, been depathologized to the extent that, in its putatively new form, it bears little resemblance to the depressive condition put forth by Freud in his seminal essay ‘Mourning and Melancholia’. Not simply conceived as an ethical model, post-Freudian theorists also regard melancholia as a transformative and politicized mode of remembrance

that opens up infinite possibilities for the reimagining of the lost object. Curiously, however, in figuring melancholia in these terms theorists continue to refer back to Freud's original binary of grief. The contemporary celebration of melancholia is thus only possible insofar as theorists enact a partial and tendentious reading of Freudian theory that overlooks its more insidious and bleak elements. Indeed, in his essay Freud is at pains to demonstrate how the melancholic's preservation of the other is a self-oriented gesture aimed at foreclosing a loss of ego. Loved narcissistically as an idealized mirror of the self, the object also becomes the site of the ambivalent relationship between self and other that plays out in death. Rather than safeguarding the lost other, then, the melancholic repeatedly repulses and re-appropriates the object in a gesture that gradually leads to its expulsion. Yet even if we return to Freud's later theorization of loss in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), in which melancholia is figured as the normative process by which the ego incorporates its losses, it still remains that melancholia is an unconscious mechanism that forecloses the remembrance of the object.

Despite these misgivings, melancholia, like its theoretical counterpart haunting, has been deployed across the humanities in response to a whole host of different losses. The risk, then, is that melancholia becomes yet another metanarrative of the postmodern era, belying the attentiveness to the local and the particular that inspired its depathologization in the first place. This thesis thus began by grounding melancholia within the specific context of postcolonial Algeria and, in particular, the novels of contemporary authors Assia Djebar, Yasmina Khadra, and Boualem Sansal. In doing so, it problematized an ethics of melancholia to suggest that, despite its ever-expanding frame of reference, melancholia does not represent a blueprint that can be readily transposed onto different contexts. A close reading of the authors' narratives suggested instead that melancholia can be a problematic tool that hinders,

rather than promotes, the remembrance of Algeria's past. Divided into two sections, the first four chapters focussed on how different aspects of melancholia emerge within the literary texts of Djébar, Khadra, and Sansal. It aimed to problematize the widespread conceptualization of melancholia as a mnemonic prototype and to provide a counterpoint to the notion that it is a wholly ethical mode of grief. In Part II, the final two chapters marked the need for new forms of memorialization that move beyond the curiously pervasive Freudian binarism, focusing in particular on the concept of 'working upon' the past.

If the introduction examined the recent turn to melancholia in generalized terms, stressing the fact that it is an unconscious and conservative model of grief that thwarts linguistic expression, Chapter One began by problematizing the notion that melancholia enacts an ethical preservation of the lost object. It explored the different forms of melancholic incorporation at stake in Assia Djébar's novels *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (1995) and *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002) to reveal how the unconscious appropriation of the object proves troubling for an ethics of memory. Beginning with an exploration of Djébar's literary resurrection of the dead ghosts of her friends Kader Alloula, M'Hamed Boukhobza, and Mahfoud Boucebcî, it demonstrated how Djébar's ethical conjuring of the spectre is linked to her desire to attend to 'unfinished business' or, to paraphrase Freud, to deal with the ambivalence at the heart of melancholic object relations. What is more, Djébar implicitly reveals that her preservation of her friends is tied to a self-referential desire to preserve the self, thus calling into question the notion that melancholia is necessarily other-oriented. Djébar's anxiety vis-à-vis the ethics of melancholia is developed throughout *La Femme sans sépulture* as the phantom of Zoulikha Oudai destabilizes the lives of her daughters, Hania and Mina, who remain haunted by their mother's traumatic death. Building upon the

psychoanalytical concepts of cryptophoria and transgenerational haunting in the work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, the chapter revealed how melancholic incorporation immobilizes the grieving subject, who cannot decode the phantomogenic language of the ghostly other. What is more, the repetition at the heart of melancholia risks ensnaring its objects in a circuitous process of return. Juxtaposing the structure of melancholic object relations with that of colonial desire, I read in melancholia an unethical desire for appropriation that leaves the spectre suspended in a state of in-between.

Chapter Two further problematized the ethics of melancholia by probing its relationship to victimhood in Sansal's novel *Le Village de l'Allemand: ou Le journal des frères Schiller* (2008). Developing upon Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's observation that the German population's thwarted mourning for the victims of Nazism arose out of its narcissistic attachment to Hitler, I demonstrated how Rachel's melancholic incorporation of his father forecloses a genuine engagement with the victims of the Holocaust. As he identifies increasingly as Hans Schiller, Rachel's suicide can be viewed as an act of patricide and an attempt to atone for his father's role in the Holocaust; it also reads as an act of preservation, safeguarding the memory of a perpetrator and attesting to the ambivalence that underpins melancholia. Though Rachel ostensibly desires to establish an ethical engagement with the other, moreover, this is thwarted by his usurpation of the victim subject-position. His suicide figures as a gross parody of the Final Solution, in which he 'acts out' the ultimate moments of the gas chamber victims in a disturbing scene that reduces the Holocaust to a spectacle. I read in Sansal's text, then, a troubling relationship between melancholia and victimhood that calls into question the celebration of melancholia as an ethical model.

Chapter Three interpreted nostalgia as a form of melancholia that attaches to the irrevocably lost homeland. By reading Berkane's return to Algeria in Djébar's novel *La Disparition de la langue française* (2003) as an insatiable desire to recover the idealized lost object, I suggested that melancholic longing can lead to an endless series of substitutions and displacements. Berkane's nostalgic desire to recover the motherland and to find it unchanged by the ravages of time is also a screen for his more nascent desire to recover the maternal imago and to return to a state of embryonic unity. His desperate quest for a putative wholeness sees him seeking the lost object in a number of different people and places, none of which can satiate his desires. I read in Djébar's novel a caveat against the dangers of conflating absence with loss, as Berkane's nostalgia for idealized objects, places, and temporalities leads him to seek something which can never be recovered because it only ever existed at the level of fantasy. His endless quest for a putative sense of plenitude also blinds him to the political violence of Algeria during the 1990s. Rather than deploying memory to analyse the ideology and rhetoric of the civil war, Berkane seeks solace in autobiography and his retrospective gaze isolates him from others. Djébar is thus critical of processes of memorialization that fail to establish connections between the past and the present, suggesting that the melancholic preservation of the past as an immutable spatio-temporal sphere detracts from the demands of the contemporary era.

Chapter Four built upon the problem of nostalgia and its idealized preservation of the past. By juxtaposing Khadra's novel *À quoi rêvent les loups* (1999) with Gillo Pontecorvo's film *La Bataille d'Alger* (1966), I interpreted the melancholic violence of the civil war of the 1990s as the corollary of the failed ideals of the Algerian independence movement. The *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) of Khadra's novel parodies the *Front de Libération Nationale* of

Pontecorvo's film, suggesting that the FIS deployed similar rhetoric to bolster its hegemony and legitimize its political claims. What is more, the mimetic parallels between the texts intimate that the FIS melancholically appropriated the failed ideals of the FLN's independence movement, deploying to advantage the confusion surrounding the aims of decolonization to posit an altered version of the past. Indeed, in recoding the lost ideals of independence as the FLN's failure to establish an Islamic state based on sharia law—despite the fact that this was never a priority—the FIS distorted the past for its own gain. The FIS's translation of these absent ideals into putatively lost ideals problematizes the FLN's own mythologization of the past, as well as the notion that melancholia can assist in processes of remembrance. Ranjana Khanna argues that we should remain attached to the lost feminist ideals of the Algerian War, yet a reading of the parallels between Khadra and Pontecorvo's texts problematizes their unconscious or automatic recovery. Instead, I argued, *À quoi rêvent les loups* calls for new modes of remembrance that consciously question the relationship between the past and the present in order to identify how particular historical elements emerge unconsciously in contemporary politics.

If the first section of the thesis problematized the recent recuperation of melancholia as an ethico-political mnemonic model, in Part II I turned to modes of working upon the past. Whereas mourning is equated with amnesia and melancholia induces a sterile process of repetition, working upon was instead imagined as a continuous and conscious process of remembrance that engages the past as an on-going part of the present. In seeking interconnections between different memorial threads, it problematizes melancholic narratives that fuel identitarian victim subject-positions. Chapter Five built upon Dominick LaCapra's and Mireille Rosello's theorization of the concept of 'working through' to analyse how the

detective novels of Khadra and Sansal instantiate a tentative model of working upon the Algerian past. By deploying the manner in which detective fiction seeks to revise the past in light of the present, and vice versa, the authors figure the process of memorialization as a continual act of (re)translation that seeks not a singular truth, but an enlarged frame of reference that problematizes binary logic. Working upon the past thus figures as an on-going task that resists closure and redemption in favour of critical modes of thought. This conceptualization of ‘working upon’ emerges in the very structures of Sansal’s *Le Serment des barbares* (1999) and Khadra’s detective series *Le Quatuor algérien* (2009) as the narratives fail to solve once and for all the connections between the Algerian War and the civil war of the 1990s. If the detectives do not succeed in proffering a totalizing narrative solution, however, this should be read both as a resistance to closure and as an ethical demand that calls upon the reader to continue the necessarily difficult process of working upon the past.

While Chapter Five figured ‘working upon’ as a historical model, in Chapter Six I analysed Djébar’s narrative *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (2007) as a more private examination of memorialization. Building upon the notion that working upon entails a process of revision and retranslation that refutes closure, I revealed how Djébar’s latest autofictional text invokes an ethics of memory that begins, surprisingly, with a return to the self. Representing a marked shift away from her earlier ‘spectralized’ corpus, I read in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* a call for a new model of grief that acknowledges the subject’s inherent connection to the (lost) other. Refuting the putatively ethical melancholic preservation of the other, Djébar reveals how she is both constituted by, and dispossessed by, the individuals she loses. Developing Judith Butler’s theorization of grief as a form of

dispossession that has unknowable transformational consequences for the subject, I argued that Djébar's text sees the subject acquiesce to loss and the profound changes it can generate. The subject is rendered vulnerable in ways that are unimaginable in a melancholic model that foregrounds the self-serving appropriation of the object, instead enabling a reconnection with the fragility of the other. The recognition of the other's vulnerability operates as a point of departure for an ethics of memory that is inherently self-questioning and open to change.

In its on-going and critical disavowal of closure and its refusal to fetishize the traumatic condition, then, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* shares some of the elements of working upon established in Sansal's and Khadra's detective fiction. Yet it is also a painfully private meditation on grief and death, proffering a more personal ethics of loss that moves beyond the scope of their narratives. In doing so, it underscores the idea that processes of working upon are dependent upon their context. In problematizing the ethico-political usefulness of melancholia in the contemporary era, then, my aim has not been to proffer a facile counter-narrative or a paradigm that can be readily applied to a whole series of indeterminate losses. Rather, the concept of working upon must be adapted to individual contexts in order to attend to their particular demands and historical singularities. By calling for new models of memorialization that move beyond the Freudian binary of mourning and melancholia, then, this thesis points to the need for emergent scholarship on memory that might further elaborate, to paraphrase Theodor Adorno, the meaning of working upon the past.

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